

POLLY WITH A PAST

P 70

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY
GEORGE MIDDLETON AND GUY BOLTON

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"Polly With a Past"

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PROGRAM

DAVID BELASCO

PRESENTS

POLLY WITH A PAST

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

GEORGE MIDDLETON and GUY BOLTON

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ORIGINAL CAST

HARRY RICHARDSON Cyril Scott
REX VAN ZILE Herbert Yost
PRENTICE VAN ZILE, Rex's uncle..H. Reeves-Smith
STILES William Sampson
CLAY COLLUM, an interior decorator,
George Stuart Christie
A STRANGER Robert Fischer
COMMODORE "BOB" BARKER Thomas Reynolds
POLLY SHANNON Ina Claire
MRS. MARTHA VAN ZILE, Rex's mother,
Winifred Fraser
MYRTLE DAVIS Anne Meredith
MRS. CLEMENTINE DAVIS, her mother,
Louise Galloway
PARKER, a maid Mildred Dean

SCENES

- ACT I. The Richardson-Collum apartment, New
York City. Late in July.
ACT II. The Van Zile summer home, Northamp-
ton, L. I. Early August.
ACT III. The same. A few days later.

Staged by DAVID BELASCO

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GEORGE MIDDLETON and GUY BOLTON

As played 326 performances at the Belasco Theatre,
New York City, where it was first produced,
September 6, 1917. Also produced at the
St. James Theatre, London, March 2, 1921,
under direction of Gilbert Miller.

POLLY WITH A PAST

ACT ONE *

SCENE: *The apartment of HARRY RICHARDSON and CLAY COLLUM, New York City.*

A large living-room and dining-room of a type found in the small apartment of the most modern style. To the left, in back, is a door, showing a square vestibule with a hallway leading off left, presumably to the front door. To the right and also in back, there is a swinging door opening into the butler's pantry; a door at the back of the pantry is supposed to open into the kitchen. The two upper corners of the room are cut off in angles; the one at the right being occupied by a studio window that looks out over the street and roof tops. There is a dainty awning outside. A doorway into the boys' bedroom is on the left side near the footlights.

A baby-grand piano at the right beside the wall has its keyboard toward the window. There is a piano-bench back of this. A lamp with a shade of fancy ostrich plumes stands

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on the piano. A folding dining-table is near the window. A cellarette is near the bedroom door. Beyond this there is a sofa. There are comfortable armchairs about the room. On these are various samples of brocades and old "stuffs."

The entire room is furnished with exquisite taste, although the prevailing note is masculine comfort.

Over everything broods the atmosphere of a stifling afternoon in late July.

CLAY COLLUM is discovered at the telephone. He is an interior decorator about thirty; a nice, clean-cut young fellow.

CLAY. [At phone.] Ah, good afternoon, Mrs. Livingston. Yes. Frankly I don't think the cerise you suggested would do at all. No—not with the curtains I have selected. Why not almond green? That's the new color. I'm expecting a new consignment on the *Rochambeau*. I'll come up myself—yes—thank you. Good afternoon.

[He hangs up the receiver and busies himself fixing the draperies on the chairs.]

HARRY RICHARDSON enters. He is a trifle older than CLAY; a handsome, matter-of-fact fellow with a keen sense of humor, not averse to directing things and succeeding by sheer force of his excessive vitality.]

HARRY. Oh, you're at home, are you?

CLAY. No—I'm fighting the waves at Northampton.

HARRY. Please don't remind me of Long Island and the ocean after the day I've had. [*Takes off coat.*]

CLAY. Why—was the Stock Exchange bad to-day?

HARRY. Bad? The worst case of fits and starts on record. Every stock and bond had St. Vitus' dance. I'm through. I'm going to give the market absent treatment until the middle of August.

CLAY. Were you caught in the shower?

HARRY. No—I came up in the car. It didn't amount to much. [*Sits in chair on which is some drapery.*]

CLAY. Don't sit there.

HARRY. What's the matter with you? Why not?

CLAY. That's going to be Mrs. Van Zile's new boudoir. I'm doing over her town house.

HARRY. [*Pointing to another chair.*] Well, whose room is *this* now?

CLAY. *That's* going to be Rex's bedroom.

HARRY. Rex's bedroom. Well, I can sit down there with perfect propriety. [*Sits.*] That's what I get for sharing an apartment with one of our classiest interior decorators. Last year we were a symphony in brown. This spring I had to move out while you changed it to a harmony in blue. What's it going to be next winter—a panorama in pink?

CLAY. If you'll pardon the suggestion—you need a cold shower.

HARRY. I'm going to take it, too. I don't suppose you want a gin fizz?

CLAY. [*Indicating almost empty gin bottle.*] I did, but I've got over it.

HARRY. [*Holds up bottle.*] Got over it? Well, I should think you had. What did you do? Take a bath in it?

[*Phone rings.*]

CLAY. [*At phone.*] Hello! Who? Why, what are *you* doing in town? Oh! That's it? She's coming here to see *me*? [*Astonished.*] About a benefit? But—oh—all right. You come on over and stay to dinner, too. Yes, we're going to have dinner here to-night.

HARRY. Ah—ho! A lady coming to see you!

CLAY. [*Not pleased.*] Myrtle Davis.

HARRY. That's bad.

CLAY. And her mother.

HARRY. Too bad. [*Indicating phone.*] Who was it warned you?

CLAY. Rex Van Zile.

HARRY. Rex? Did he come to town *with* Myrtle?

CLAY. No; he wants to meet her here—*accidentally*.

HARRY. Say, he must have it bad to leave the beach and follow her to town this sort of weather.

CLAY. You forgot Rex finds Myrtle a cool proposition.

HARRY. I certainly wonder what Rex sees in Myrtle.

CLAY. With the grouch you've got you'd wonder what anyone sees in the Venus de Milo.

HARRY. No, I shouldn't. A nice cool marble lady would appeal to me strongly just now.

CLAY. Better hustle and take that shower. They'll be around soon. *I'll* send out for some gin.

HARRY. Why don't you get it yourself? You need the exercise. You haven't stretched a muscle in a month.

[A faint roll of thunder is heard off.]

CLAY. Oh, all right. What's that—thunder?

HARRY. It looks as though it might rain again. Better take a parasol.

CLAY. Oh, shut up!

HARRY. Bring in a paper—last edition. The score was 8 to 8 in the eleventh inning.

CLAY. *[Casually.]* Are they playing baseball at the Polo Grounds to-day?

HARRY. No—checkers.

[HARRY exits into bedroom. CLAY puts on hat and goes out in back. Pause. Empty stage.]

POLLY SHANNON enters quietly from pantry. POLLY is a very pretty girl in her early twenties, with an air of innate refinement that is accentuated by her simple maid's dress

of some thin black material. There is a compelling charm about her that awakens interest. The easy deftness of her movements, and a certain steady purposeful look in her face, makes you feel that she can cope with far greater responsibilities than the charge of the Collum-Richardson apartment. She has a great fund of humor that is covered at present by a polite gravity. In her earlier scenes she is deferential without being humble. She somehow conveys the sense that she emphasizes the conventional deportment of the maid more as a protective barrier for herself, than through any feeling of the inferiority of her position.

POLLY, who has a watering-can, goes to flowers in window and waters them, takes pot back into pantry, gets tray, puts chair beside table which she places near piano, takes magazines off and puts same on small stand near window. Then she notices a sheet of music and, after looking about and seeing no one, sits and plays, singing sweetly for a while.

REX VAN ZILE enters quietly, with bunch of flowers in his hand. He comes down looking at her as she sings without seeing him.

REX is a grown-up boy, ingenuous, simple, totally incapable of dissimulation. He doesn't know it, but his clumsy helplessness is of the

sort that appeals to the mother instinct of women very strongly, and he seems quite unconscious also of his good-looking manliness. He gives the effect of possessing social background, and he also shows in his dress and manner that he is accustomed to having money. At present he is dispirited and listless, with flashes of nervous anxiety showing through. He is obsessed with a fixed idea and shows but little interest in anything that doesn't remind him in some way of the girl he loves. He is about twenty-seven years old.]

POLLY. [*Turning half indignantly and seeing it is a stranger.*] Who are you? Aren't you in the wrong apartment?

REX. [*Nervously.*] No—I—I don't think so?

POLLY. This is Mr. Collum's apartment.

REX. Oh, Mr. Richardson is staying here, too. I'm a friend of theirs. Rex Van Zile is my name.

POLLY. [*Relieved.*] Oh, yes, sir. The gentleman they go to visit on Sundays.

REX. I met Mr. Collum going out and he gave me his key.

POLLY. Oh! [*Slight pause.*] Shall I take your flowers, sir?

REX. [*Surprised at his having them.*] Flowers? Oh, yes. My mother thought the fellows would like them.

POLLY. Thank you. I'm sure the gentlemen will be very pleased, sir.

REX. I'm afraid they're a bit wilted. I've been carrying them around in the car all day.

POLLY. Dahlias. [*Crossing to put them in vase and speaking half to herself.*] I haven't seen them since I left home.

REX. Our place is smothered in them.

POLLY. It must be lovely in the country now. [*Putting flowers in bowl and placing them on piano.*] If you don't mind, sir, I'll go on with my work.

REX. Not at all.

POLLY. They're going to have dinner at home tonight. [*Pulls table into place to lay it.*]

REX. [*Watch in hand, sitting in chair below piano.*] I suppose you don't know if a lady phoned here before I came?

POLLY. [*Bringing in tray.*] A lady?

REX. Miss Davis is her name. She said she'd be here at five and it's almost half-past.

POLLY. Perhaps that shower we had delayed her, sir.

REX. Yes—that's why I'm so anxious. She may have been out in it.

POLLY. I shouldn't worry. [*Gets plates off tray on chair.*]

REX. But I'm all on edge.

POLLY. Yes—I know the way you feel. [*Behind table, fixing napkins.*]

REX. Do you? I suppose it seems funny my talking this way to you?

POLLY. Oh, I understand. Being a servant's a terrible lonely job. Sometimes I feel I *must* talk to someone—anyone—or I'll go mad.

REX. That's the way *I* feel now.

POLLY. If it's any relief to talk, please do.

REX. Thanks.

POLLY. [*Casually.*] I could see you were in trouble when you came in.

REX. Terrible trouble. I'm in love. [*Sort of offhand.*] But I suppose you could see that, too.

POLLY. [*Casually.*] Yes, sir.

REX. [*Turning to her in surprise.*] You could?

POLLY. That's the thing women notice first about any man.

REX. [*Shaking his head.*] Guess I don't know much about women.

POLLY. Haven't you any sisters?

REX. [*Sadly.*] No.

POLLY. [*Fixing rolls in napkins.*] That's a pity—but I suppose it's too late to worry about that now.

REX. Yes; my father's dead. [*POLLY gets knives and forks and salt and pepper off tray.*] Tell me, have you ever been in love? [*Taking it seriously.*]

POLLY. Not yet, sir.

REX. Gosh! You're lucky. [*Really noticing her for the first time.*] Do you know, you don't seem like a servant.

POLLY. [*Enigmatically.*] Don't I?

REX. Not a bit. What's your name.

POLLY. Polly, sir.

REX. Polly. You're quite sure I haven't bored you talking about my troubles, Polly?

POLLY. Not a bit, sir. But then you haven't mentioned any troubles.

REX. Haven't I? You see, I'm always afraid I'll be laughed at.

POLLY. I wouldn't laugh.

REX. A chap in love with a girl who doesn't love him may be funny, but he doesn't *feel* funny.

POLLY. Oh, that's how it is. [*Getting bowl from sill, and through REX's next speech arranges flowers.*]

REX. I'm not good enough for her—that's the trouble. She's interested in New Thought and New Art and the New Philanthropy—new all sorts of things. And when it comes to saving drunkards and dope fiends, she'd make the Salvation Army look like a piker.

POLLY. Pardon me, but do you drink?

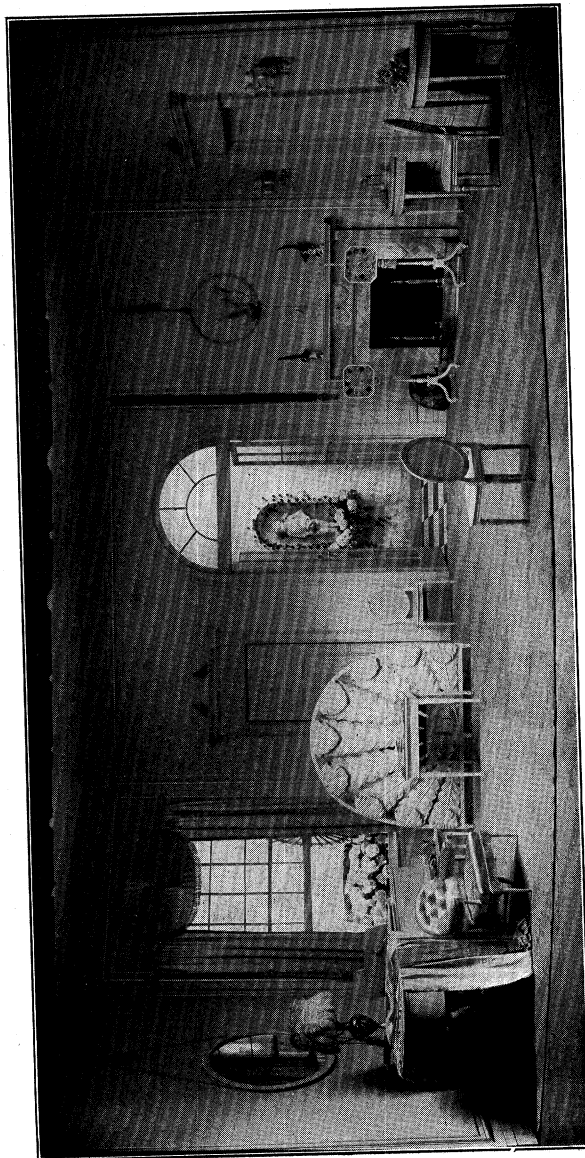
REX. [*Startled by this unexpected question.*]
No. Two drinks make me so ill I have to go to bed for a week.

POLLY. That's a pity.

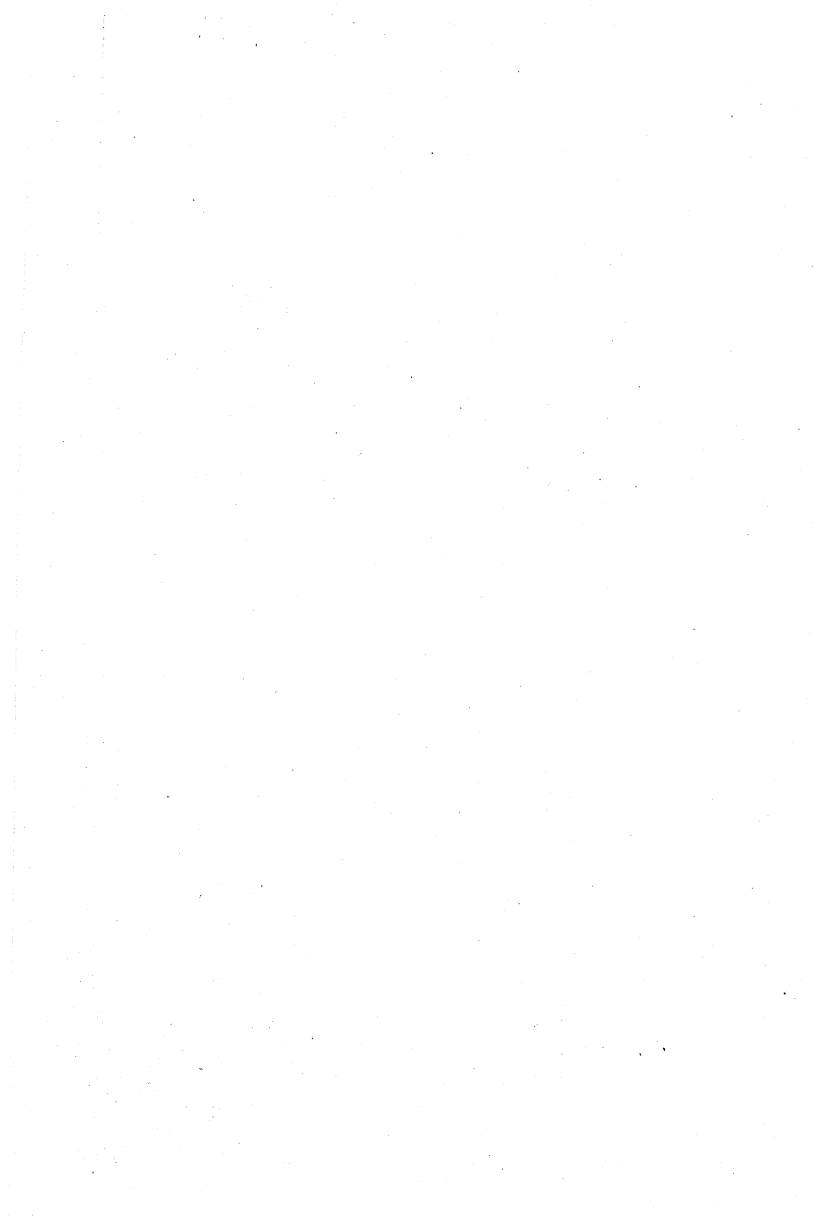
REX. [*Surprised.*] Eh?

POLLY. I was just thinking if you were a hard drinker a girl like that might enjoy saving *you*.

REX. Saving *me*?



"POLLY WITH A PAST"
 SET OF THE BALCONY THEATRE NEW YORK SET FOR ACT I OF "POLLY WITH A PAST"



POLLY. Yes, sir; lots of girls marry men to reform them.

[HARRY enters; he is completely changed; his hair is slicked, testifying to his shower, he wears cool flannels and looks thoroughly comfortable and cheerful.]

POLLY exits into pantry.]

HARRY. Hello, Rex; when did you get here?

REX. Just a minute or two ago.

HARRY. [*Confidentially, half-joshing him.*] What time do you expect this sweet little ball-and-chain of yours?

REX. I suppose that's awfully funny. [*Not laughing.*] Ha-ha!

HARRY. Got a grouch, have you? It's the weather. What you need is a cool shower. [*Goes to piano.*]

REX. Thanks, but I was almost caught in one. I hope Myrtle wasn't out in it. [*Looks at watch.*] I can't imagine what's happened to her.

HARRY. Maybe a raindrop fell on her and she melted. You'd like her to melt a little, wouldn't you?

[*Doorbell rings.*]

REX. [*Agitated.*] Sh! There she is now. [*Busies fixing himself. POLLY goes to door from pantry door opening on vestibule.*]

HARRY. What's the idea of the flower in the buttonhole? Think Myrtle will imagine you're getting artistic?

[POLLY enters from hall and admits CLAY, who gives her his umbrella. He carries several bottles wrapped up.]

REX. Is it?

HARRY. Mr. Collum, the interior decorator, with the interior decorations.

CLAY. [*Holding up bottles.*] Gin, brandy, Scotch.

HARRY. Now we'll have a party. Polly, will you bring in some cracked ice and some sliced oranges?

[POLLY exits with CLAY'S umbrella.]

REX. [*To CLAY.*] Here's your keys.

HARRY. Did you bring the paper? Who won the game?

CLAY. Didn't look. [*Hands him paper.*]

HARRY. Didn't look? With three teams tied for first place! [*Looks eagerly at paper.*] Holy mackerel! Noon edition! [*Crumples paper savagely.*]

CLAY. [*Takes it.*] Here! Don't tear that paper. I was just reading about Petrowski's suicide.

REX. Is Petrowski that great Polish pianist?

CLAY. Yes.

REX. [*Proudly.*] Myrtle knew him.

HARRY. Oh, did she?

CLAY. [*Referring to newspaper.*] Petrowski's been missing a month now. [*To REX, with importance.*] They think he drowned himself on account of some mysterious woman who turned him down.

HARRY. [*Lighting his pipe.*] Killed himself for the love of a woman, eh? Don't talk about that in

front of Rex. We'll have the police dragging the river for *him* next. [POLLY enters with tray of bottles which HARRY takes and puts on small table.] We don't want to have to buy Mr. Van Zile flowers, do we, Polly?

POLLY. Mr. Van Zile is very thoughtful, sir—he brought some with him. [POLLY indicates vase and flowers which she placed on the piano. All look towards it and REX smiles.]

HARRY. Dear little dahlias! How sweet!

[Doorbell rings.]

REX. [Explosively.] Myrtle!

CLAY. Wait—a little appropriate music. [Dashing over to piano, throwing paper on chair, starts to play wedding march. POLLY goes to door.]

REX. Cut it out, you idiot.

[POLLY returns with a letter.]

POLLY. [Giving it to CLAY.] A letter from your office, Mr. Collum.

[REX sinks into armchair below piano, with a deep sigh of disappointment.]

HARRY. Cheer up, funeral face. [Going to mix cocktails in shaker, as POLLY starts to put tray back in hall.] Oh, Polly! Will you set a place for Mr. Van Zile; he's going to stay to dinner.

POLLY. Yes, sir.

[Goes out in the hall, puts salver down and crosses back of screen and pours out two glasses of water.]

CLAY. [*Staring at letter.*] From France! I know what that means: another two-hour translation job.

POLLY. The boy said if it's anything important, would you please call up the business manager.

CLAY. Oh, they want it right away? Oh, Lord—I'm sunk. I left my French dictionary at the office. Do you read French, Rex?

REX. No. [*Rising.*] Say, fellows, do you think Myrtle could have forgotten the address?

HARRY. [*Withers REX with a look while mixing cocktails. Then speaks to CLAY.*] Why do they give *you* the French correspondence if you don't know French?

CLAY. Old Goujod, who buys for us in Paris, is away on his vacation. [*Rising.*] Well, I suppose I've got to go over to the office for that dictionary.

POLLY. [*Comes from behind screen, crosses to table with water on tray.*] Perhaps I can translate it for you, Mr. Collum.

CLAY. [*All astonished.*] You?

HARRY. What? You speak French?

POLLY. Yes, sir—more or less.

[*CLAY gives POLLY letter.*]

HARRY. [*Has shaker in hand.*] Eighth little wonder of the world! Darns, sews on buttons, splendid manager—and now she can speak French.

POLLY. [*Looks over letter.*] Oh, sir—I—I rather think there's some mistake.

CLAY. Who's it from?

POLLY. It's signed Lucille Bady.

HARRY. Code signature? [CLAY *shakes head, puzzled.*]

POLLY. [CLAY and HARRY are on either side of her; REX is in back, obviously thinking of MYRTLE.] I'll translate it freely. "Mon petit Chou"—my little cabbage—[*They look at one another.*] "I am longing to see you and it is a cruel distress that you are going to spend the vacation with your wife at Ocean Grove. Have you forgotten those three glorious days at Dieppe? When I——"

HARRY. [*Eagerly.*] Go on—what happened at Dieppe?

POLLY. "When I——" [*Hesitates.*]

CLAY. Don't leave us in this suspense.

POLLY. [*Reading it innocently, with perfect accent.*] "Quand j'avait mordu tes gentilles petites oreilles!"

HARRY. [*Blankly looking at CLAY, who doesn't understand either.*] Well?

POLLY. I don't think I'd better, sir. It's evidently a private letter for Mr. Goujod.

HARRY. Very private.

CLAY. [*Takes letter and puts it on lower edge of piano.*] Thank you very much, Polly; you saved me a trip to the office.

POLLY. [*Crossing up to pantry door, turning.*] What time would you like dinner served, Mr. Richardson?

CLAY. Well, let me see——

HARRY. Wait one moment. [*To POLLY.*] You don't mind if I ask you a few questions?

POLLY. [*Defensively.*] Questions?

HARRY. [*With sincere kindly interest throughout.*] You can't blame us for being a little curious: the way you look—the way you talk. And now you can speak French.

REX. [*Coming down.*] And play the piano.

CLAY. Play the piano?

REX. And sing.

CLAY. And sing?

HARRY. And sing?

POLLY. [*A bit confused.*] I thought you wouldn't mind, sir.

HARRY. Of course, we don't mind. But tell us, Polly, *who* are you?

CLAY. Yes—who are you?

POLLY. I hope I'm giving you satisfaction, sir.

CLAY. You certainly are. But you must have some sort of a story.

POLLY. [*A trifle on her dignity.*] Surely, sir, whatever story I have is my own.

HARRY. [*Seeing her hesitate.*] Of course; of course; and we don't want to intrude. But you're so far above what you are doing.

POLLY. [*In a simple genuine manner, as she sees they are questioning her in kindness.*] When you're "broke" you find you're not above a lot of things you thought you were.

HARRY. Oh, you're broke?

POLLY. I was pretty close to starving when I came here, sir.

CLAY. [*Seriously.*] You never did any house-work before, did you?

POLLY. [*Smiling.*] Am I as bad as all that? I worked for my father; cooked and waited on his guests.

HARRY. Guests? Was he a hotel keeper?

POLLY. At times it seemed that way. He was a minister.

CLAY. [*All surprised.*] A minister's daughter!

POLLY. Father had a church in East Gilead, Ohio. It's only a little place. He had a big heart and was always saving people.

REX. [*Eagerly.*] Just like Myrtle. [*CLAY and HARRY squelch him and he sits quickly.*]

HARRY. He saved everything except money?

POLLY. Yes, sir. And mother wasn't much help to him—that way. Mother was French. [*With a touch of sentiment.*] I always think of her as a sort of caged butterfly that doesn't know enough about the sunshine and freedom to be happy.

CLAY. It was from your mother you learned French?

POLLY. Yes, sir; we used to talk French together all the time. In fact, when I was a child, I spoke English with an accent and I didn't lose it till after she died.

CLAY. M-m——

HARRY. [*Sympathetically.*] Your father is dead, too?

POLLY. [*Simply.*] Yes, sir.

HARRY. [*After a slight pause, he suddenly brings down chair, CLAY making a vain effort to assist. Changing the subject.*] Sit down, Polly. [*She hesitates and does so.*] Tell me—what made you leave East Gilead?

POLLY. [*With a twinkle.*] Have you ever been there?

HARRY. Never.

REX. Why didn't you marry? [HARRY *again gives him a withering glance.*]

POLLY. I see you've never been in East Gilead, either.

REX. [*Blankly.*] No.

[CLAY *sits on edge of piano-bench.*]

POLLY. And then I had an ambition. I suppose mother rather fostered it in me. I want to be a singer.

CLAY. [*Rising.*] A singer? Have you a voice?

POLLY. [*Humorously.*] I don't think I'm a Melba—yet.

HARRY. [*Consoling her.*] But you're young.

POLLY. Yes. And I'm on my way to Paris now to have my voice trained.

HARRY. [*Astonished.*] On your way to Paris?

CLAY. Paris?

POLLY. [*Smiling.*] You think I've rather lost my sense of direction?—I tried for a church choir

position when I first got here; but that was no use. It was summer time. I couldn't even get a companionship. And the woman at the employment bureau didn't seem able to suggest anything. I was very, very desperate. And then you two gentlemen walked in and Mr. Collum said, "I want a girl who can do light housekeeping."

CLAY. [*Recalling.*] "Three rooms and kitchenette—maid's room on the top floor—cook breakfasts—and dinner sometimes."

REX. [*Sentimentally at the picture suggested.*] Fine.

POLLY. And so I thought——

HARRY. [*With great admiration.*] What pluck—eh, Clay?

CLAY. You bet!

POLLY. [*Simply.*] Why? I had to do *something*. And I realized it was only till I could get a better position. [*Rising.*]

CLAY. Yes—of course—of course.

HARRY. Polly, there's something coming to you and I'm going to try and see you get it.

CLAY. I've never understood why people should always pick the thoroughly worthless and give them assistance.

REX. [*Rising.*] That's just what I say to Myrtle.

[CLAY *squelches* REX; *he sits down again.*]

HARRY. Thank Heaven, here's a chance to give a hand to someone who deserves it.

POLLY. I—I couldn't accept any help, sir.

CLAY. Don't talk nonsense.

HARRY. Mr. Collum will take you to a singing teacher to-morrow morning. Then if you make good we'll get up a fund for you.

CLAY. You can put *me* down for five.

HARRY. [*Disappointed.*] Five? Five what?

CLAY. Five hundred.

REX. [*Rising.*] I'll come in, too.

HARRY. Good. [*Now smiles approvingly at REX.*]

POLLY. You—you're very kind—all of you, but I can't accept any help.

REX. Why not?

POLLY. Have you ever been a minister's daughter?

REX. [*Seriously.*] No.

[*Again HARRY goes to him and he sinks down.*]

POLLY. Ever since I can remember I've known what it is to live on charity. When father died I made up my mind I'd have one rule in my life—I wouldn't take anything I didn't *earn*. [*Making an emphatic point.*]

HARRY. But you can pay us back.

POLLY. Don't think I'm ungrateful. It's splendid of you. Whatever I do—wherever I go to—I'll always look back at the days I've spent here

among the very happiest times in my life. Only—only when it comes to money, that's the way I feel. [*With a quiet determination.*] I've got to earn all I get.

HARRY. You're a damn fine sport, Polly.

CLAY. Sh-h! Minister's daughter! [*Makes a gesture as though praying.*]

POLLY. [*Smiling.*] Please don't hold it against me.

HARRY. Polly, you're made of the stuff that *succeeds*.

POLLY. Thank you. I hope I'm going to succeed. [*With sense of determination.*] I *mean* to and I think I shall.

HARRY. *We* must have a good talk about this career of yours to-morrow, Polly.

CLAY. We? What do *you* know about music? [*Waving him aside.*] I'm the only one for you to consult.

HARRY. Ah, is that so?

POLLY. [*Smiling.*] You're both very good. But just at present my job is cooking your dinner, and I'm afraid I shan't be a success at that if I leave it any longer. [*Turning.*] What time shall I serve dinner?

CLAY. What do you think, Harry?

HARRY. Oh, I'd forgotten that this is the cook's night out. [*Deferentially to POLLY.*] You mustn't trouble to get dinner for us.

CLAY. [*Same.*] No, don't bother.

POLLY. Why? I've gotten everything ready. I've done the best I could.

HARRY. We can go out.

CLAY. Yes, just as we generally do.

POLLY. It's all right, sir.

HARRY. [*Deferentially.*] Well then, six-thirty.

CLAY. Yes, six-thirty.

HARRY. [*Same.*] If it's all the same to you?

CLAY. [*Same.*] If you're sure it won't inconvenience you?

[*POLLY endeavors to replace chair by table to its place against back wall. HARRY and CLAY graciously assist her with the chair; they bow to her in their most courteous manner.*]

POLLY. [*Going up as they follow.*] Six-thirty—yes, sir. [*Exits to kitchen, closing pantry door.*]

CLAY and HARRY come down looking at each other.]

HARRY. Some girl!

CLAY. I should say so.

HARRY. Much as I hate to lose her she can't go on staying here.

CLAY. No, I suppose not. It's up to us to find her a job.

REX. I'll speak to mother; maybe she'll know of something.

[*HARRY has gone to piano and begins to pick out scales with one finger.*]

CLAY. Well, what's the matter with you?

HARRY. I used to be able to play the damn thing when I was a kid. I might be able to pick it up again. [*Door bell rings.*]

REX. [*Eagerly.*] Oh, this *must* be Myrtle at last!

[*As POLLY comes to pantry door to open other door, HARRY and CLAY go quickly to her, same business as before.*]

HARRY. [*On one side of pantry door.*] We'll attend to the door, Polly.

CLAY. [*Other side of pantry door.*] Yes; don't bother.

POLLY. [*Puzzled.*] But—?

HARRY. It's no trouble at all.

CLAY. No.

[*Bewildered, POLLY goes back as they close pantry door. HARRY opens hall door, MRS. DAVIS and MYRTLE enter.*]

MYRTLE's good looks are sufficiently striking to explain, in some manner, Rex's infatuation. Apparently she believes in her own sincerity, but it seems evident that an overwhelming egotism is her chief motive force in the charitable activities of which we have heard so much.

MRS. DAVIS, her mother, is a "fluffy" kittenish type of woman, completely under the domination of the more strong-minded daughter.

They are both well-dressed. MYRTLE is

twenty-three or -four and MRS. DAVIS under forty-five and looking rather younger.]

HARRY. Enter! We thought you lost your way.

CLAY. Good afternoon, Mrs. Davis—Miss Davis.

MRS. DAVIS. Hello, Rexey. I'm sorry we were detained. Myrtle's been doing some missionary work again. [HARRY has put on his coat.]

MYRTLE. How do you do, Mr. Collum. I've got a man here with me whom I've just rescued from the gutter.

REX. O Lord.

MYRTLE. Ah, are you here, Rex?

REX. [Weakly.] Just happened in. I got caught in the shower.

MYRTLE. I'm very much interested in him. I'm taking him down to-night to Northampton. He's a reformed drunkard. [REX goes up and closes door.]

HARRY. Reformed drunkard! Very interesting, that! [Attempting to conceal cellarette and the drinks with his body and the spread of his coat.]

MYRTLE. I thought perhaps he could wait in the kitchenette.

HARRY. [Looking at CLAY as he stands in front of door where POLLY is.] I'm—oh—I'm afraid that's not possible.

MYRTLE. Not possible? [REX stands up at hall door, gazing at MYRTLE.]

HARRY. No. But we don't mind having him here with us.

MRS. DAVIS. What do you mean?

CLAY. We think we're more suitable companions for a reformed drunkard than—er—our——

HARRY. Than our——

MRS. DAVIS. Than your cook?

[MYRTLE goes up stage to call STILES.]

HARRY. [*Absently.*] We're not thinking of a cook. [*Instantly he apologizes.*] It's the maid we're thinking of.

MYRTLE. [*In hall, calling down stairs.*] Stiles, you'll have to wait on the stairs.

HARRY. If Stiles is used to the gutter *that* ought to be all right for him.

MRS. DAVIS. Oh, is this the new room, Mr. Colum? [*Rising and walking about.*]

CLAY. Yes.

HARRY. Yes—latest edition.

MRS. DAVIS. Oh—it's lovely—lovely. I'm going to order a screen like that.

CLAY. Oh, thank you.

HARRY. You'll stay and have a bite with us?

CLAY. We're very informal, you know.

HARRY. Oh, very informal. If one of his clients came we should all have to hide in the kitchenette. But never mind.

MRS. DAVIS. How interesting! So Bohemian. I should love to stay and——

REX. [*Eagerly, to MYRTLE.*] Oh, yes, do. *I'm* staying, too.

HARRY. Yes, come on; we'll have a party.

MYRTLE. [*Coming down.*] I'm sorry, but we

must catch the 6.30. I've got to send off a lot of circulars for the Life Savers' Benefit.

REX. The Life Savers! —

MRS. DAVIS. Wonderful men—so brave and with such splendid physiques. When anyone is drowning, they never stop to think what may happen to themselves, but rush boldly into the water——

REX. [*Interrupting savagely.*] With a rope tied around them and three men on the other end.

MYRTLE. [*Gently reproving.*] Even if you have no interest in my work, Rex, you needn't make slighting remarks about the people I'm trying to help.

REX. [*Turning to MYRTLE.*] But why give them *all* your time, Myrtle?

MYRTLE. [*In her best platform manner.*] I give them all my time because I love to. Nothing compares with the thrill you get knowing you have saved some poor human derelict.

HARRY. [*Aside, to CLAY.*] She's off.

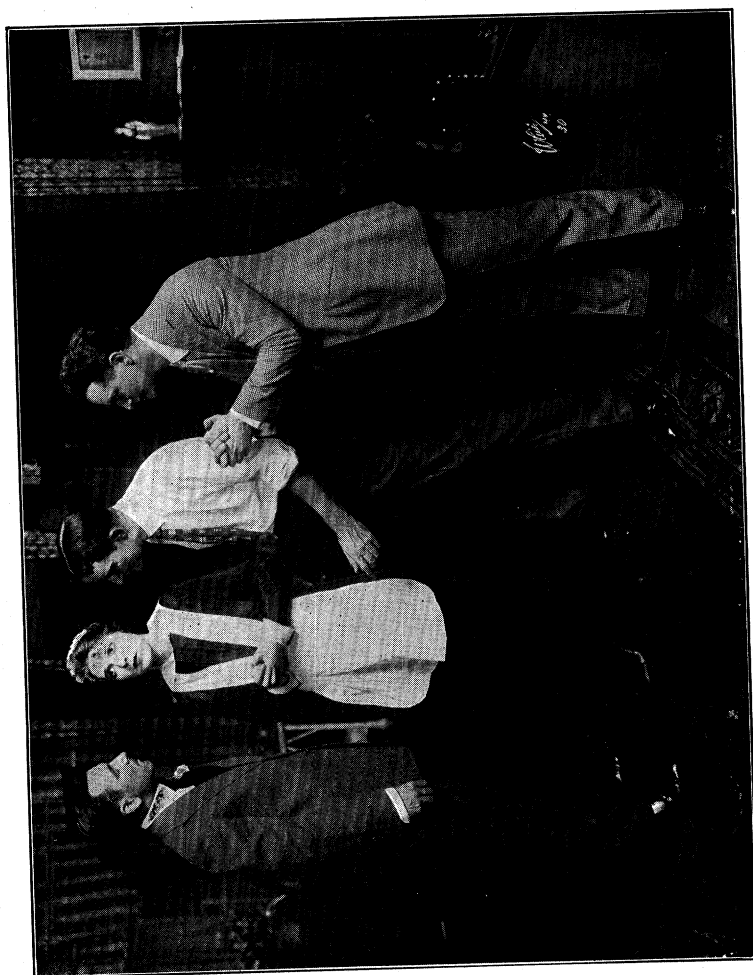
MYRTLE. If you could all realize the joy it is to watch, day by day, as the lost one grows stronger, better, nobler under your guiding hand. What's that lovely passage about the potter and the clay?

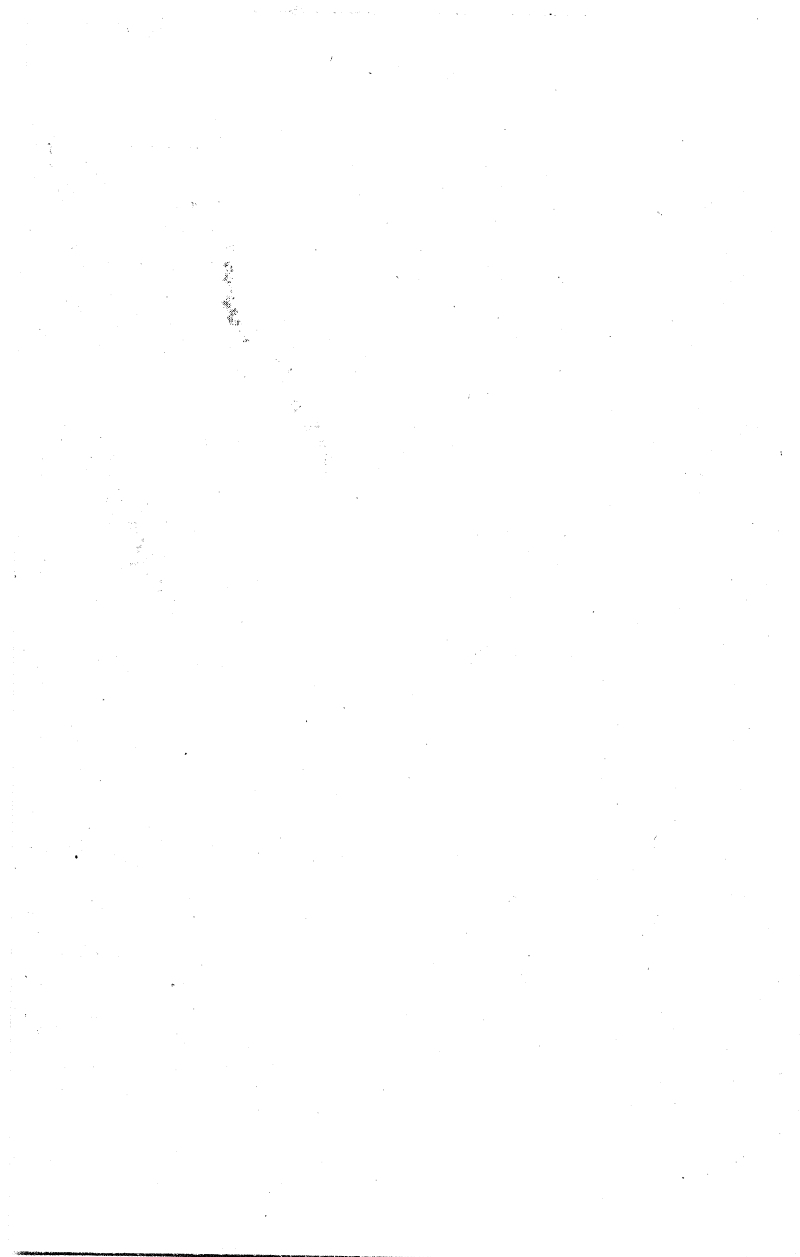
HARRY. [*Absently.*] "All is not gold that glitters." [*Realizing mistake and correcting himself.*]

"For I remember stopping by the way

To watch a potter thumping his wet clay!"

MYRTLE. That is how I feel. I am a worker in the clay of humanity.





MRS. DAVIS. She gets that reforming instinct from me. You ought to have seen what her father was before I married him. I hardly thought he'd live a year—but he surprised us all.

HARRY. And now you're helping the Life Savers.

CLAY. Yes—helping the——

MYRTLE. Yes. It's about the Benefit Performance for the Life Savers that I came to see you, Mr. Collum.

MRS. DAVIS. Mr. Van Zile has promised to double all we raise.

HARRY. What? [*At REX, who is gazing fondly at MYRTLE.*] Are we entertaining a Carnegie un-
wares?

REX. No—no—not me; my uncle Prentice.

MRS. DAVIS. Rex's uncle is *so* fond of Myrtle.

HARRY. [*To MRS. DAVIS.*] Yes—and so is Rex.
[*MRS. DAVIS smiles knowingly.*]

MYRTLE. Rex has told me you and Mr. Richardson are going to spend your vacation with him at Northampton. You will be sweet and play for us at the Benefit, won't you?

CLAY. [*Hesitating.*] Why, surely.

MYRTLE. [*Quickly.*] Thank you, Mr. Collum.

MRS. DAVIS. Isn't Myrtle persuasive?

HARRY. It's really wonderful how she wins people.

CLAY. Let me see: a Life Savers' Benefit! What do you want me to play?

MYRTLE. Something sweet and appropriate.

REX. Why don't you play, "Throw Out the Life Line!"

MYRTLE. [*Looks at him, he rises.*] I suppose that's meant to be humorous.

REX. [*Gives a faint smile.*] I'm awfully sorry if I've vexed you, Myrtle. I'll subscribe for twenty seats now. Please forgive me.

MYRTLE. I'll think about forgiving you; but I'll put you down for the twenty seats. [*Makes memorandum.*]

HARRY. You're too good to him, Miss Davis.

MYRTLE. [*Softening.*] If you really want to be forgiven you will take Stiles.

REX. Take Stiles where—to the concert?

MYRTLE. No—no—no. I mean take him on as valet or butler or something.

REX. [*Aghast, pointing to door.*] You mean this fellow you picked out of the gutter?

MYRTLE. Yes.

MRS. DAVIS. Myrtle promised to find him a position.

REX. [*Vaguely.*] I'll ask mother——

MYRTLE. He could drive your car while he's looking around for something better.

HARRY. Hope he won't do much looking around while I'm in the car.

REX. Oh, I didn't know he was a chauffeur.

MYRTLE. He isn't; but he's very willing.

MRS. DAVIS. Yes; he told us he didn't care *what* he does.

MYRTLE. [*Going to hall.*] I'll call him in and you can tell him the good news, Rex. [*Going out.*] He'll be pleased.

REX. [*Rising.*] Here! Wait one moment, Myrtle. I didn't say—

HARRY. What a wonderful girl your daughter is! Always doing something splendid—noble.

MRS. DAVIS. Yes, she ought to make some good man very happy—eventually.

HARRY. Yes—eventually.

MYRTLE. Come in, Stiles.

[*STILES enters, a drab, middle-aged, weak-eyed man, in no sense a caricature. This is not the first time he has been "saved." He alternates between spells of religious exaltation and the more obvious charm of comfortable backsliding.*]

This is Mr. Van Zile, your new employer.

STILES. [*Aggressively.*] Employer? What does he want me to do?

REX. [*Floundering.*] Mrs. Davis says you're very willing.

STILES. You *bet* I am; but it mustn't be hard work.

CLAY. Oh, no; they wouldn't expect that.

HARRY. No; all you've got to do is sit in the kitchen and let the maid wait on you.

STILES. That'll be all right, sir. I'm willing to *try* the job.

REX. Thank you, Stiles.

STILES. You're welcome.

MRS. DAVIS. [*Explaining.*] He says he's been laid up for two weeks.

CLAY. What laid you up?

HARRY. Drink?

STILES. No, sir. I tripped on the curb and a blamed auter-*mo*-bile ran into me. By Jiminy, if ever I get behind one of them sterrin' wheels, I'll get a little of my own back.

HARRY. *Not* chauffeur, Rex.

REX. I might put him on as gardener.

STILES. Gardener! Well, long as it don't mean I've got to dig, nor lift nothing, nor stand around watering flowers.

MRS. DAVIS. Do you know anything about gardening, Stiles?

STILES. Me? I was born on a buckwheat farm back in *Ohio*.

HARRY. Raised to be a farmer, were you?

STILES. No, sir. I was raised to go into politics. Mother hoped she'd see me President of the United States some day; but I've disappointed her—so far.

MRS. DAVIS. Well, don't give up hope, Stiles.

[CLAY rises, goes up and gets flowers out of window.]

STILES. No, I won't Ma'am.

MYRTLE. [*Rising and mustering her forces.*] We must go now. Stiles will report at your house to-morrow, Rex. He can sleep over your garage to-night. Thank you, Mr. Collum. Good-bye, Mr.

Richardson. Try to think up something atmospheric. Rex, you can mail the cheque for the seats to our treasurer, Commodore Barker. Come, Mother.

[CLAY gives flowers to ladies.]

MRS. DAVIS. Yes, dear. Good night, boys. Don't forget to come and take me for a spin in your new car, Rex.

REX. Surely I will; and I was hoping that Myrtle—

MYRTLE. Perhaps some day after the concert is over. Good-bye. [Exits followed by her mother.]

[STILES, who has stood aside to let them pass, casts a look of lingering regret at the brandy flask on the cellarette, and sneaks a drink before they come down.]

HARRY. [Reëntering.] Hey—hey—do you want a drink? [Takes off coat.]

STILES. No, sir. If you knew what that awful stuff does to you, you'd give me that bottle and tell me to empty it in the street.

HARRY. I'll bet you'd empty it before you got to the street.

STILES. Just let Miss Davis talk to you about drink. She'll save you. Look what she's done for me, and she can make just as much out of you. [Exits.]

HARRY. Oh, can she! He's a brandied peach, all right. [CLAY closes hall door.] Phew! [They turn, become serious as they see REX sitting with

his head in his hands.] It seems a shame a beautiful girl like Myrtle wasting her time on such creatures.

REX. Yes; isn't she beautiful?

HARRY. She's a humdinger, all right.

[CLAY plays piano: sentimental tune.]

REX. [*Gazing raptly before him.*] That's just what she is: a humdinger.

CLAY. They'd make a pretty pair, wouldn't they, Harry?

HARRY. They certainly would.

REX. Huh! What chance have I got? She cares more about that specimen preserved in alcohol than she does about me.

HARRY. Because she's saved him.

CLAY. If only *you* were some sort of a human wreck.

REX. That's what your maid, Polly, said.

HARRY. [*Bursting out.*] Don't tell me you started right in babbling about your unrequited love to *her*!

CLAY. Gosh! You're getting to be a public nuisance.

REX. [*Getting up.*] Well, if that's the way you feel, I'll go——

HARRY. [*Rising and stopping him; CLAY rises too, affectionately.*] Now, hold on, old chap.

REX. I suppose I *am* a nuisance. I can't talk about anything but Myrtle because she's the only thing I can think of. You needn't tell me I'm mak-

ing a fool of myself. I *know* it. I go down at night and hang around outside her home and watch the light in her window, afraid to go in.

CLAY. Sounds as though you were a married man already.

HARRY. Don't laugh at him, Clay—he's pretty hard hit.

CLAY. I don't mean to laugh. Gosh! If there were any way I could do to help you, Rex, I'd do it. You know that.

HARRY. Same here, Rex. You see, the girl I love is three thousand miles away—so I understand, old chap. I'd do anything if it meant your happiness.

REX. Thanks, fellows.

HARRY. [*His arm around him.*] If you only had some nice human vices. But I suppose it would be pretty hard to make Myrtle think *you* a rake.

REX. [*Regretfully.*] Yes—she's known me ever since I was a kid in a Lord Fauntleroy velvet suit and long curls.

HARRY. [*With awe.*] A little halo on legs.

REX. Once she kept me waiting three hours to take her to a dancing class. And all the time she was around behind the barn getting a written promise from Tommy Bowles to quit smoking.

[*POLLY enters unobserved, carrying plates, which she soon puts on dining-table.*]

HARRY. [*Earnestly.*] I wish I could think of some way to *help* you.

CLAY. [*Turning away.*] I wish we could.

POLLY. [*Turning to them and thinking they are referring to her previous story.*] Thank you. You're very kind, but I'll manage all right. [*As they all look up she sees she has made a mistake.*] Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I thought you were speaking to me.

HARRY. No. We're trying to think of some way to help Mr. Van Zile now. He also has an unfulfilled dream. She's just been here.

POLLY. [*Smiling.*] Ah, yes, sir; the young lady who's always redeeming people?

HARRY. [*As though to himself.*] We were trying to imagine some way we could get her to redeem him.

POLLY. Oh, I've thought how that could be done.

HARRY. [*Astounded.*] You have?

CLAY. [*Rising.*] Have you?

POLLY. Oh, I beg pardon. I really oughtn't to presume.

REX. You've thought of some way you can get her to *save* me?

POLLY. It would be quite simple.

CLAY. He can't drink, you know.

POLLY. [*Smiling.*] It wouldn't be necessary. This is a woman.

HARRY. Save *him* from a woman?

REX. [*Eagerly.*] Go on. Tell me what you mean.

POLLY. Well, suppose there was a very beautiful and very wicked woman wanted to marry you.

REX. There isn't, is there?

POLLY. [*Laughs.*] I'm sure I don't know. What I mean is, suppose you were suddenly to be caught in the toils of some famous siren.

REX. Me?

CLAY. Rex?

POLLY. Be seen dining with her in public; then motor down to your country place and introduce her, as your fiancée, at some social function.

HARRY. [*Coming between REX and POLLY.*] I think I see what you mean.

POLLY. [*Working it out.*] Of course, there would be no real harm. Only your friends would become alarmed, fear the enchantress was going to wreck your life and cause a dreadful scandal.

HARRY. [*Eagerly.*] Why, yes; and Myrtle would jump at the chance to rescue him from disgrace and destruction.

REX. You mean to say you think Myrtle would begin to take an interest in me just because she thought I was going to the devil?

CLAY. Surest thing in the world.

HARRY. Who was it cut you out in the Fauntleroy days? Tommy Bowles! A *rake*!!

REX. And do you really think she'd try to take me *away* from another woman?

HARRY. Gosh! You know a lot about women, don't you.

POLLY. I've no doubt you gentlemen can find a better way, but I thought that, being a girl, I might understand how a girl feels.

HARRY. It's a wonderful idea.

REX. But what happens when the enchantress sues me for \$50,000, for breach of promise?

CLAY. [*His enthusiasm momentarily checked.*] That's so, Polly. An up-to-date Cleopatra would be a dangerous plaything for an amateur.

POLLY. Oh, of course you'd have to choose a nice *safe* one.

HARRY. Well, they may come nice, but they don't come safe. [*Smiles knowingly.*]

CLAY. You see, one of these local favorites with beaded eyelashes and chrome-yellow curls wouldn't do.

HARRY. No. What you need is a lady with an international reputation! Carries a lapdog the King of Siam willed her on his deathbed! Has a rope of pearls long enough to skip with! And a past that's lost in prehistoric times!

POLLY. [*Looking at REX.*] Yes, Mr. Van Zile would need something spectacular.

HARRY. But the spectacular ladies only play for high stakes.

POLLY. [*Doubtfully.*] I suppose you couldn't *engage* someone to play the part?

HARRY. I hadn't thought of that.

POLLY. Get some pretty girl who could pretend

she was that sort of woman. Of course she'd have to be unknown so that when it was all over she could disappear.

CLAY. And no one in Northampton would know *where* she'd come from or *where* she'd gone to.

POLLY. You'd have to make up a picturesque *history*. Then get her to go down to the hotel at Northampton. She knows no one—just walks up and down—heavily veiled—with her dog.

HARRY. The Masked Marvel!

POLLY. Stories begin to be whispered about her!

CLAY. *We* could do that part.

POLLY. Then, then, one day, Mr. Van Zile meets her under romantic circumstances; an acquaintance is struck up; he *pretends* to be fascinated; announces he's going to marry her—and everybody thinks he is on the high road to ruin.

CLAY. And we let a minister's daughter think of that!

POLLY. [*To CLAY.*] Oh, even a minister's daughter may read French novels.

HARRY. [*Holding picture.*] It *would* work! It *would*, Rex.

REX. [*Has been staring before him.*] But where could I find someone who'd do it? I can't start advertising for a girl who'll come and wreck my life.

[*POLLY goes about her work.*]

HARRY. No, of course not. By Jiminy—I've got it.

REX. What?

HARRY. Polly!

POLLY. [*Coming down inquiringly between HARRY and REX from pantry, thinking she has been called.*] Yes, sir.

CLAY. [*Rising, getting it as he rises slowly to his feet.*] Polly?

POLLY. Yes, sir.

REX. You don't mean—Polly?

POLLY. [*Faces about again, towards REX.*] Is it a game?

HARRY. You're the girl, Polly. You're the girl to do it.

POLLY. Do you mean *I'm* the girl to play the rôle of this international siren? You must be joking.

HARRY. No, I'm not. Don't you see? That girl you described. She's got to be a girl no one could possibly know. And then it must be someone with whom he'd be quite safe.

POLLY. [*Amused.*] Safe?

HARRY. I mean who wouldn't—

CLAY. Sue him for breach of promise—or try to make him marry her.

POLLY. I understand.

HARRY. And then you disappear.

CLAY. You want to go abroad and have your voice trained.

HARRY. *You* could be French. It would be twice as effective if the lady were French. The family

couldn't find out about her as they might if she were a domestic home-wrecker!

POLLY. [*Seeing the humor of it throughout.*] You think I look like an *imported* home-wrecker?

HARRY. I think you could do it if you wanted to.

POLLY. You heard my story.

HARRY. The parsonage in East Gilead. *I* know. But no one in East Gilead would ever hear about it.

CLAY. You could read up on the lives of the dead sirens and we'll take you around to the theatre and show you a few live ones.

POLLY. [*Putting chairs in place at table, which is now all set.*] Excuse me, sir, but it's the wildest idea I ever heard of.

HARRY. It's your idea.

POLLY. [*Dismissing it.*] Not that *I* should be the lady with the prehistoric past.

HARRY. Now hold on; we'll fix you up. We'll get you the most wonderful clothes.

CLAY. Yes—I'll buy them.

HARRY. And Rex will pay for them.

REX. [*Has been working it out himself.*] Eh?

HARRY. And the string of pearls.

REX. Pearls?

HARRY. Oh, *they* can be fake.

REX. Thank you.

HARRY. You'd be willing to plunk out something to get Myrtle, wouldn't you?

REX. I'd give every cent I've got—but——

HARRY. That's the way to talk. [*To POLLY.*]

There, you see. And in three weeks you could *earn* enough to take you over to Europe and keep you there while you were having your voice trained.

POLLY. You mean Mr. Van Zile would *pay* me?

HARRY. Of course.

CLAY. You wouldn't choose to listen to his love-sick ravings for fun, would you?

HARRY. And you say you wouldn't take any money unless you *earned* it. [*Looking at REX.*] Being engaged to a man in love with another girl would be earning it.

POLLY. Oh, no; I won't; I can't.

HARRY. [*Persistently.*] Yes, you can.

POLLY. [*To REX.*] They don't seem to be consulting you very much, Mr. Van Zile. [*REX smiles.*] After all, you ought to have something to say about who shall be engaged to ruin your reputation.

REX. Well, it seems crazy—but the way *you* described it it sounds plausible.

HARRY. Oh, she can go through with it all right.

REX. But I'm wondering now if *I* could. I'm a pretty poor liar.

HARRY. Hold on. I'll take care of the scandal department and I'll coach you carefully.

REX. [*Starts up with resolution.*] And you'll *guarantee* Myrtle will save me?

HARRY. Sure I will.

REX. Then I'm on if *you* are. Polly—will you ruin me?

HARRY. [*Pleading.*] Please, Polly.

CLAY. [*Same.*] Please, Polly.

HARRY. Think of Paris.

POLLY. I'm thinking of Paris. And it isn't fair to tempt me with a chance to fulfil my lifelong dream. [*Hesitates.*] I wonder if I could do it.

HARRY. Of course you could. You'd never meet the Northampton people again.

POLLY. [*REX stands with helpless hands out, POLLY argues with herself.*] All my life I've been poor and I've dreamed of being something, doing something with my voice. I couldn't do anything because I was poor—poor. And now you're offering me a chance to be something—to get what I want. I have nobody in the world who cares. [*Suddenly.*] Yes, Mr. Van Zile—I'll do it.

CLAY and HARRY. Bravo! Splendid!

[*They all stand and look at each other laughing, and a bit overcome by what they have undertaken. CLAY and HARRY shake hands.*]

HARRY. [*After a pause.*] Let's see; we've got to have a name.

CLAY. Yes; something showy.

POLLY. Polly—Paulette! That's it—Paulette. Let's see—— [*She sees Goujod's letter on the piano.*] What was the name on the letter?

HARRY. Yes; where's the letter?

CLAY. Oh, I left it on the piano. [*Gets letter.*] Bady.

POLLY. The letter—*Bady*. There's a name—*Paulette Bady!* That sounds naughty.

HARRY. Great! Splendid!

POLLY. Oh; but can I really look it?

REX. Yes, can she look it?

HARRY. Can she? Just take off that cap, Polly. Get those curtains of yours, Clay. We'll try how you look in fancy clothes.

CLAY. That's a great idea. Here, Polly, hold that a moment. [*Business with cloth.*] Now wait till I give you a pin—— [*Takes scarfpin out of tie.*] Now pin it there at your waist. Now turn around. Turn around again—now over your shoulder—there! [*Assists her in getting on the piano stool, where she views herself in the mirror.*]

HARRY. [*Gets lampshade.*] Now, give her something for her head. [*Puts on feather lampshade.*] Fine—splendid!

REX. Wonderful.

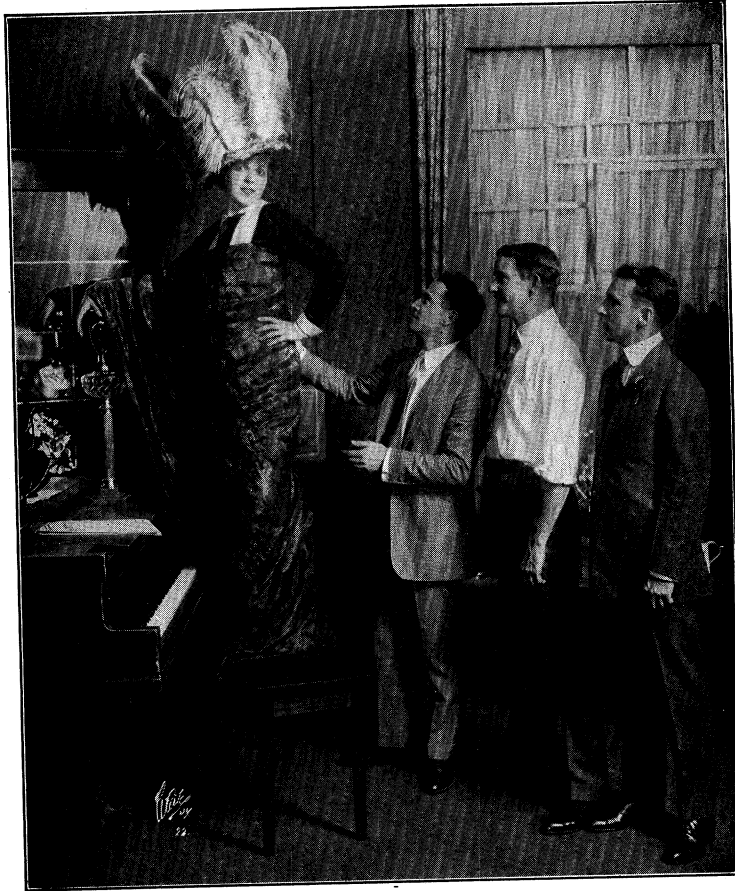
CLAY. It's great.

POLLY. [*Turning to the boys.*] There! Is this the way they look?

CLAY. Jiminy—you're a stunner.

POLLY. [*Assisted by CLAY as she steps off bench, with a French accent, as she postures hand on hip.*] Monsieur—*Merci*. Ah—*ce que je suis méchante!* Eet ees not my fault! But when a man knows me—'e ees ruined—just like zat! [*Snapping fingers in REX's astonished face.*]

HARRY and CLAY. Wonderful! Great work!



"POLLY WITH A PAST"

See Page 44



REX. I wonder what mother will say.

HARRY. She'll be tickled to death when you're safely married.

REX. So will I!

POLLY. [*Suddenly and dramatically.*] Ah-h! Sacré bleu! [*She holds up her hand dramatically.*]

ALL. What is it—what's the matter?

POLLY. The steak! It is burning! [*She drops the things and goes quickly to kitchen.*]

HARRY. I knew she could do it.

CLAY. Now we've got to think up a past for her.

HARRY. Oh, never mind about her past. Let's have a drink first. [*Goes towards cellarette, CLAY follows him.*]

REX. I think I'll take a drink, too.

HARRY. [*Hands glasses to REX and CLAY, pausing with glass in hand.*] I've got it.

REX. Yes?

HARRY. [*Picks up newspaper.*] Wait—I've got an idea. We'll say Paulette Bady is the mysterious woman for whom Petrowski killed himself!

CLAY. Great!

REX. Are you sure he wouldn't mind?

HARRY. We don't care about him. We'll drink to your coming wedding day—when the goldenrod is in bloom.

CLAY. But first of all to M'lle Paulette Bady!

HARRY. Paulette! The great adventuress! The home-wrecker! The throne-wrecker! The Inter-

national siren! [*They all raise their glasses at each sentence. REX imitates HARRY in glass motions. POLLY enters carrying steak on tray.*]

POLLY. [*Very simple, the maid again.*] Dinner is served, sir.

[*As she crosses to serve, the boys all drink with a gulp, then go to table—speaking following at random to suit action.*]

HARRY. Rex, you sit here. You're the guest of honor. The best chair in the house for you. Any particular way you like your meat?

REX. No—any way.

HARRY. No—I know you want it on your plate. [*Gives steak.*] Our decorator friend here is very particular about his meat. It must be very rare. I don't know why—artistic temperament, I suppose —[*Pausing.*] Clay, bring another plate.

POLLY. [*Surprised.*] I've set the table for three, sir.

HARRY. But we're *four*. [*Holds chair.*] Sit down, Polly.

POLLY. Oh, no, sir—I *couldn't*!

CLAY. Certainly—you *must*.

REX. Yes, we want to talk this over.

POLLY. [*As she seats herself reluctantly.*] It's awfully nice of you. Are you sure you don't mind my apron?

HARRY. [*He takes plate from CLAY and puts steak on it, passing it to POLLY. He then puts on his coat and sits at table with others.*] There we are. [POLLY

says grace, REX goes to pass salt, HARRY motions him to stop until POLLY finishes, then:] Won't you have some salt?

POLLY. When shall I get my dresses? [*They all laugh and talk excitedly.*]

[SLOW CURTAIN]

ACT TWO

SCENE: *The living room. The VAN ZILE summer home, Northampton, Long Island. Some weeks later.*

A wide, airy, comfortable room, suggesting by its furniture, light hangings and flowers, a charming summery effect.

At the back there are two large French windows, the one at left of center opening on to the hallway that leads to the front door; the other window right of center opens on the porch, which flanks the right side of the room as well. The right wall is also composed of two French windows. Left of the doorway, in back, there is a stairway ascending to the floor above. At the left there is a fireplace; below it stands a chaise-longue, and above, a settee formed by the angle of the stairs. There is also a sofa at the right, with appropriate chairs about.

The wall at the extreme back of the hallway shows one door which leads to the music room.

Through the windows can be seen a garden with trees and, beyond, the white dunes and the blue stretch of the ocean.

It is a fine afternoon early in August.

Three ladies are seated about the tea table: MRS. DAVIS, her daughter, MYRTLE, and MRS. VAN ZILE. They use fans throughout to suggest heat.

MRS. VAN ZILE is a sweet, amiable, highly bred lady nearly sixty. She is given to breathless fluttering in an emergency and, at such times, she displays her ineffectualness and a captivating lunacy bred of her total lack of conscious humor. She is a widow with an only son; needless to say she adores him. He is very fond of her, too.

As the curtain rises PARKER, the maid, dressed in conventional black gown and lace apron, enters from hall on to veranda, straightening chairs and then back into hall and then off. CLAY is faintly heard practising a piano, off in the music room in back.

MYRTLE. [*Placing down her teacup and knitting.*] I can only tell you this: she's a notorious woman.

MRS. VAN ZILE. A foreigner, of course.

MRS. DAVIS. Yes; a French woman.

MYRTLE. They say she wrecked a throne.

MRS. VAN ZILE. She must be a very violent person.

MRS. DAVIS. Oh, you don't understand; she didn't wreck it with a bomb; she wrecked it with a string of pearls.

MRS. VAN ZILE. A string of pearls—dear me!

MYRTLE. The king flaunted her. She was *quite* shameless it seems.

MRS. VAN ZILE. You know, I can't understand what is the matter with Queen mothers. Most of them appear to be very good women, but their boys are so badly brought up.

MYRTLE. No one seems to be quite clear just *which* king it was.

MRS. VAN ZILE. It's no wonder—so many of them have been getting into trouble lately.

MRS. DAVIS. She created a tremendous scandal in South America, too. The Prime Minister of Uruguay fought a duel with his own brother.

MYRTLE. Paraguay, mother.

MRS. DAVIS. No—no, dear; I'm sure Mr. Collum said Uruguay. I always remember Uruguay because it sounds as if they were calling you some name.

MYRTLE. The thing *I* don't understand is, what is she doing in Northampton.

MRS. VAN ZILE. No. If all this is true it must seem dreadfully dull to her.

MRS. DAVIS. She keeps entirely to herself—just walks up and down the beach with her dog. And such a *nice* dog, too.

MRS. VAN ZILE. *Is* it? Dear, dear, it seems too bad—the poor thing!—I suppose she's very pretty?

MRS. DAVIS. My dear, *they* always are—*that* sort.

MRS. VAN ZILE. I should rather like to see her—at a distance—you know.

MYRTLE. If you'll pardon me, Mrs. Van Zile, I don't think such a woman should be encouraged by any show of interest whatever.

MRS. DAVIS. I don't see any harm in being interested, my dear.

MYRTLE. But this woman is dangerous.

MRS. VAN ZILE. I am glad my boy doesn't care for women.

MYRTLE. Ah, if they were all as safe as Rex.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Dear me—there, I dropped a stitch.

[*Enter STILES, carrying a pair of gardener shears. He is cleaned up a bit and wears a gardener's blue apron.*]

STILES. Excuse me, Mrs. Van Zile—[*To others.*] Oh, good afternoon, Ma'am; good afternoon, Miss.

MYRTLE. Good afternoon, Stiles. I'm glad to see you're getting along.

STILES. [*Crossing.*] Thank you, Miss. [*Approaching and lowering his voice confidentially to MYRTLE.*] And I've lost the craving. I haven't so much as *thought* of a glass of beer in three days.

MYRTLE. Of course not. Your mind is on higher things.

STILES. No, ma'am, I ain't thought of the fifteen-cent drinks neither.

MYRTLE. I mean higher in a spiritual, not a monetary sense, Stiles.

STILES. [*Abashed.*] Oh, yes'm. I guess now I'm started, I'm in for it.

MRS. DAVIS. [*Vivaciously.*] Yes; it's like walking a tight-rope across Niagara: you've got to keep straight and keep going.

STILES. [*Shaking head mournfully.*] Gee, to think even if I fell off I'd only strike water.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Did you wish to speak to me, Stiles?

STILES. [*Taking a step towards MRS. VAN ZILE.*] You said you'd show me how many of them hygeraniums to get ready.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Correcting him.*] Hydrangeas, Stiles. Oh, yes, Myrtle, I'm sending over some hydrangeas to decorate the platform for the concert to-night.

MYRTLE. That's very kind of you.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Stiles, Miss Davis and I will come and select them after we've had tea.

STILES. All right, ma'am. I'll be out back digging potatoes.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Be very careful, Stiles; I don't want to find myself eating tulip-bulbs as I did last night.

STILES. We don't grow them fancy vegetables back in East Gilead.

MYRTLE. East Gilead?

STILES. That's where I come from.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Ah, yes—"Balm of Gilead"—the name mentioned in the Bible.

STILES. The way the Gilead folks talk you'd think they was *each* mentioned in it. [*Exits off into garden.*]

MRS. DAVIS. [*To MYRTLE.*] Have you asked Rex if he will be an usher at the concert?

MYRTLE. No, mother. Rex is very unsympathetic toward the Life Savers.

[COMMODORE BOB *starts humming off.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Protesting.*] Oh, I'm sure you're mistaken——

[COMMODORE BOB *appears in hallway carrying a newspaper.*]

He is a genial, sportive gentleman of fifty-odd, with plenty of money, and of an easy-going, good-natured temperament. He is the style that rises to eminence in local yacht clubs and honorary military organizations. In spite of his sex he is the most confirmed gossip in Northampton.]

COMMODORE. Good afternoon, ladies. Hello, Martha.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Hello, Robert.

COMMODORE. Have you told them the news?

MRS. VAN ZILE. News?

COMMODORE. You don't mean to say that he has kept it a secret for nearly a week? It has been the talk of the club all afternoon and you haven't heard? [*Sitting by tea table.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Half rising.*] I—I don't understand. Nothing has happened to Rex?

COMMODORE. I should say something has happened to Rex. He's a hero! A life-saver! [MRS. VAN ZILE *sits again.*]

MYRTLE. A life-saver? Whom did he save?

COMMODORE. That charming French actress!

MRS. DAVIS. What?

MRS. VAN ZILE. Not that dreadful woman?	} [<i>All together.</i>]
MYRTLE. A life-saver?	
MRS. DAVIS. Who told you?	

COMMODORE. [*Opening paper.*] Northampton *Courier*. Just out this afternoon. Listen—[*Reads.*] "A Modest Hero"—that's the headline.

MRS. VAN ZILE. My boy!

COMMODORE. "The Northampton Cottage Colony boasts a hero in the person of Mr. Rex Van Zile, who, with his mother, is summering in our midst. It appears that at dawn on Wednesday morning he rescued from drowning——"

MYRTLE. Drowning!

COMMODORE. —"M'lle Paulette Bady, the celebrated French actress, who was taking her matutinal dip. Mr. Van Zile was walking along the beach when he heard her cry for help——"

MRS. VAN ZILE. I always urged Rex to keep up his French; you never can tell when it will be useful. Yes, go on, cousin.

COMMODORE. [*Continuing.*] —"and without hes-

itating for a moment he plunged gallantly into the water—— [*Pauses as he turns over paper.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Breathless.*] Please—— please——

COMMODORE. —“We regret to say that further particulars are lacking owing to the inaccessibility of the lady, who chooses to *clothe* herself in an air of mystery!” [*Pause.*] —“We understand, however, that a friendship has resulted from this romantic introduction!” [*He looks at them and smiles broadly.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. What!

MYRTLE. [*Confidently.*] Rex and that woman! Oh, no! [*Turning and resuming knitting.*]

COMMODORE. Why not? Why not? She’s a nectarine! I’d just like to have a corner on the opera-glass market if she ever comes down to the beach in one of those French bathing suits.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Oh, Robert!

MYRTLE. What did I tell you, Mrs. Van Zile? [*MRS. VAN ZILE is pouring out tea for COMMODORE.*] She’s a positive menace to the moral welfare of the community.

COMMODORE. [*Turning to MRS. DAVIS, who turns to him.*] I admit her past is a bit patchy; but a pretty, fascinatin’ woman ought to be allowed some leeway, I say.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Some tea? [*Offering him the cup of tea.*]

COMMODORE. [*Taking it.*] Thank you.

MYRTLE. I don't approve of such loose views, Commodore.

COMMODORE. Loose nothing. Broad. That's all. These foreigners have standards of their own. *I* know. There's some French in me, too.

MYRTLE. [*Dryly.*] Yes, I've no doubt.

COMMODORE. Well, Rex is a lucky young beggar. Wish I'd rescued her, that's all.

[HARRY and CLAY come out of library into hall. HARRY pantomimes to CLAY to go down the hall to get REX. HARRY enters room; CLAY exits down hall.]

HARRY. [*Having heard last sentence of COMMODORE.*] Oh, you've heard about Rex?

COMMODORE. Yes.

HARRY. The *Courier* is out then?

COMMODORE. Sure. Did *you* know it was going to be in the *Courier*?

HARRY. [*Floundering.*] Why — er — no — of course not. [*Music heard off, again.*] I—er—I saw you were reading it.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Cup of tea, Harry? Will you please ring the bell? Do you know where Rex is, Harry?

HARRY. Why, hasn't he been about here—upstairs or something? [*Takes cup and goes to stairway.*]

MRS. DAVIS. Perhaps you can tell us some things about M'lle Bady, Mr. Richardson.

HARRY. I could—of course; but I don't think I'd better.

COMMODORE. That's right; remember, there are ladies present.

MRS. DAVIS. [*Rising.*] Oh, Mr. Richardson, do go on; we widows hear so few good stories.

MYRTLE. Mother!

[*PARKER, the maid, enters for hot-water jug.*]

MRS. DAVIS. You can go in the music room, dear. I hear Mr. Collum in there practising for your concert. [*Sitting again.*]

[*MRS. VAN ZILE gives maid hot-water pitcher to replenish, PARKER exits.*]

MYRTLE. I think you are all displaying entirely too much levity regarding this woman. Have none of you any *social* conscience? Surely you know enough about her now, mother, to see that she is a positive danger to weak-minded, unprincipled men. [*Looks at COMMODORE.*]

MRS. DAVIS. I know, Myrtle; but if it weren't for women like this how would we know some men are weak?

MRS. VAN ZILE. I really wish next time Rex saves someone's life, he'd be a little more careful who it is.

[*Enter REX; he carries Salomé under one arm. Salomé is a toy dog and wears a large ribbon to match POLLY'S gown.*]

REX. [*Standing on threshold, overwhelmed at seeing everyone there.*] Hello, Harry.

HARRY. [*Grabbing him.*] Hello, Rex.

REX. I didn't know there were people here. I'll come back later. [*Starts off, HARRY stops him.*]

HARRY. Stay here!

REX. [*Aside.*] Not now.

HARRY. [*Same.*] Now!

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Rising and crossing to him.*]
My boy! My hero!

COMMODORE. [*Rising, applauding, crossing to REX.*] Bravo, my boy, bravo!

REX. [*Turns, not understanding.*] Mother, I have brought a—a very charming lady who is anxious to meet you.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Sweetly.*] Oh, how nice! Who is she?

REX. M'lle Paulette Bady.

[*HARRY punches REX; an admonition to be strong.*]

COMMODORE. Holy—jumping Moses!

[*MRS. VAN ZILE gets to her feet, opens her mouth as if she were going to speak, struggles to articulate, but fails. MRS. DAVIS and MYRTLE gasp.*]

POLLY enters, ravishingly dressed in the most ultra French mode. She stands there a glorious picture, smiling around at them.

She comes down and speaks with a delicious French accent.]

POLLY. Bon soir. I 'ope I am not de trop? You must pardon ze familiarity, but I so desire to meet Madame Von Zeel. [*Advancing to MRS. DAVIS.*] Rex, ees zees your mama?

MRS. DAVIS. [*Rising, backing away.*] Not yet—I——

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Rising.*] No—I—I——

REX. This is my mama—— [*Correcting himself.*] Mother, Paulette.

MRS. DAVIS. [*Murmuring.*] Paulette!

[*MYRTLE rises, pushing back her chair.*]

POLLY. Oh! What a lovely mama! Ze grande dame! Only so sweet! You are out of ze picture book.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Flattered and then flabbergasted.*] How—how do you do.

POLLY. [*Shakes MRS. VAN ZILE's hand.*] Rex, 'e tell me 'ow wondairful a mozair 'e 'ave.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Pleased in spite of herself.*] Did he! [*Laughs nervously.*]

POLLY. [*Turning on REX with a rapid volley of French.*] Elle est charmante! Exquise! D'une beauté! Je n'aurais jamais cru qu'elle est si belle!

REX. [*Shows in his manner he hasn't understood one word.*] Yes.

[*MAID enters with pitcher of hot water.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Completely flustered.*] Yes—yes, of course. Won't you sit down?

POLLY. Merci! Oh, my little babee! [*Gives dog to MAID, who has in the meantime deposited the pitcher on the tea wagon.*] Will you please take Salomé for a run in ze Park?

[*PARKER takes dog and exits off to porch.*]

REX. This is Mrs. Davis, M'lle Bady—and Miss Davis.

[*MYRTLE merely inclines her head.*]

MRS. DAVIS. Good afternoon.

POLLY. 'Ow do you do.

REX. And my chum—Harry Richardson.

POLLY. What ees eet—chom?

REX. Pals—friends.

POLLY. Ah-h—très bien! [*With gesture from herself to him.*] Like you and me—hein? [*Looks at others, smiles to note the effect, then holds out hand to HARRY, crosses to him.*] So charm to meet you. [*Holding HARRY's hand.*] Such a fine vireel man!

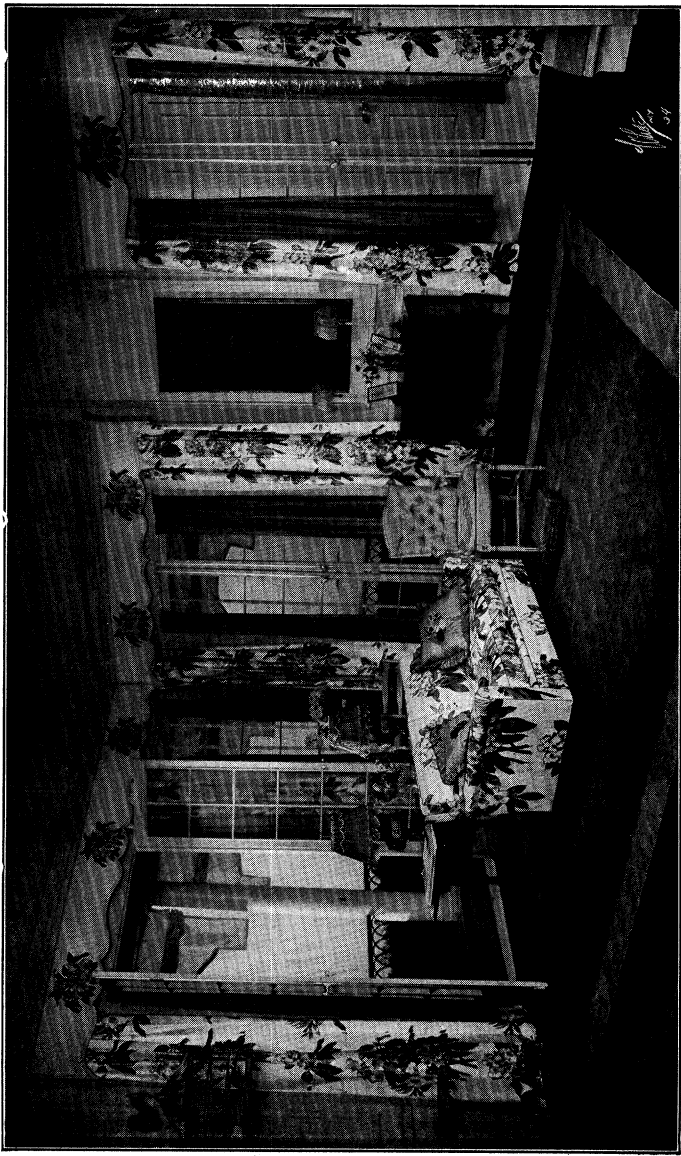
[*HARRY smiles knowingly and puffs up.*]

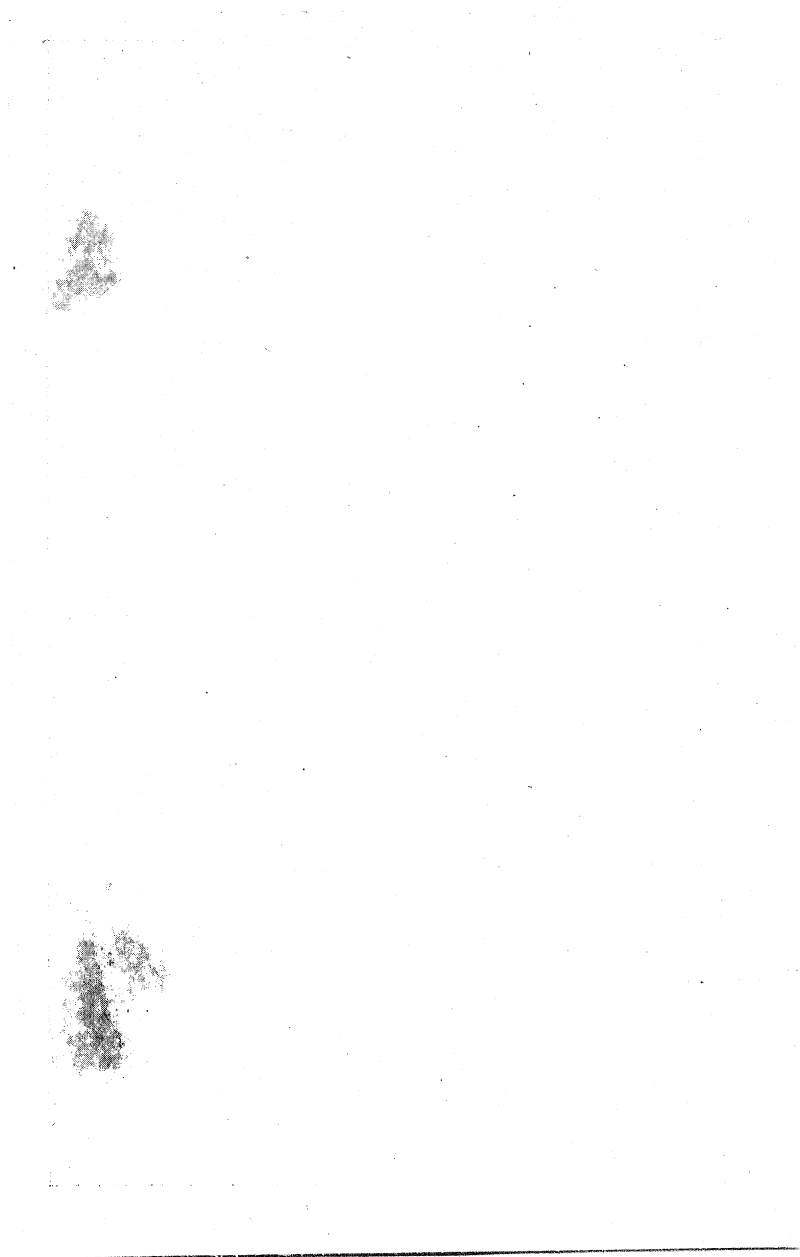
HARRY. We must be chums, too, Mademoiselle.

POLLY. Mais oui! Certainment! [*Speaks frankly to the women, who are shocked.*] I like—ze men. [*Shows her back to audience; her gown is very low cut and covered with lace.*]

MRS. DAVIS. You needn't have told us that.

MYRTLE. I think mother and I are out of place here, Mrs. Van Zile.





MRS. DAVIS. [*Aside to MYRTLE.*] Please, Myrtle.

POLLY. Oh, no—no! I like ze women, too—sometimes. [COMMODORE *coughs vigorously to draw attention to himself.*] May I came and sit by you, Mrs. Von Zeel? Merci! [*Catching sight of COMMODORE.*] Ah, who ees ze other young man?

[COMMODORE *beams with pleasure at the flattery as she extends her hand.*]

HARRY. Commodore Barker.

COMMODORE. [*Crossing in front of tea table, to POLLY, he bows graciously, as she extends her hand he kisses it.*] Ah—I was afraid you were going to leave me out.

[MRS. VAN ZILE *taps him from behind with her fan.*]

POLLY. Pairhaps Rex 'e was afraid you waire a leetle too gay for me to know.

COMMODORE. Too gay? [*Smiling broadly.*] Gosh! You flatter me!

POLLY. Ees eet so, monsieur? 'E look like a naughty boy—hein? 'E 'ave ze same weecked eye as zat bad man in Uruguay.

MRS. DAVIS. [*Triumphantly to MRS. VAN ZILE.*] It was Uruguay.

COMMODORE. [*Making conversation.*] We were—we were—we were just talking about you when you came in.

[*The ladies show their embarrassment; they try to stop the COMMODORE; but as POLLY turns, they all start to fan themselves.*]

POLLY. About me? [*Turning to REX.*] Oh—now I know why my left ear she burn so.

COMMODORE. [*Indicating chaise-longue, putting pillows from settee.*] Won't you sit here?

POLLY. No; no. You say bad zings about me.

COMMODORE. No such thing. I was just telling them about Rex saving your life. [*Looks at REX, who likewise knows nothing.*]

POLLY. Saving my life?

HARRY. [*Trying to create a diversion as POLLY looks at HARRY in amazement.*] Perhaps you will have some cake, Mademoiselle?

MRS. VAN ZILE. I think you ought to have told me about this, Rex.

REX. [*Absolutely at a loss.*] About what?

MRS. VAN ZILE. About your rescuing Mademoiselle.

REX. Yes—ah—perhaps I should, mother.

HARRY. [*Shows newspaper.*] Haven't you seen this, Rex?

REX. No.

HARRY. [*Giving it to him.*] Look at it.

MRS. DAVIS. We are so anxious to hear some of the details. Please tell us about it, Mademoiselle.

MYRTLE. Mother!

POLLY. [*Crossing to tea table.*] Eet—eet was such a dreadful expairience. I cannot bear to zeenk of eet. Evair seence I am a small child, I 'ave such a 'orror of fire!

ALL. Fire? Fire? I beg your pardon, did you say fire?

POLLY. [*Confidently, in spite of HARRY's warning gesture.*] But your brave boy, 'e ees not afraid of ze flames. [*They look at each other puzzled.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. *Flames?*

MRS. DAVIS. Rex doesn't seem afraid of anything.

HARRY. [*Pointedly to POLLY so she will get it.*] Mrs. Davis isn't speaking about the fire. [*Melodramatically.*] She means the time he saved you from drowning, a week ago, when you cried for help and he came running along the beach at dawn.

POLLY. [*Understanding.*] Oh-h! Oui — oui — zat time?

[COMMODORE *sits on edge of chaise-longue.*]

HARRY. [*Agreeing.*] Yes, that time.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Good gracious! Have you saved her more than once, Rex?

REX. The other time was *nothing*.

POLLY. [*Breaking in.*] No—no. I drop my cigarette on my skirt—zat ees all.

COMMODORE. But the drowning—that was real Carnegie medal stuff, eh?

POLLY. Mais oui, 'e should have a medal.

COMMODORE. Go on tell us about it. I'll see if I can get him one.

POLLY. [*Seeing she must go on, after looking helplessly at REX.*] Imagine to yourself: I am alone.

MRS. DAVIS. Why do you go in alone?

POLLY. I go alone because I don't like to be stared at by everybody. You see, my bathing suit—eet ees just a trifle—a trifle——

COMMODORE. It's just a trifle, eh?

MRS. VAN ZILE. Robert!

MRS. DAVIS. Please go on, Mademoiselle.

POLLY. [*Rising.*] I am out of my depth. Ze waves are beeg like mountains. Ze undairtow eet ees terrible. I scream. I 'ear a voice answair—"I come!" [*She looks at HARRY, he nods approvingly.*] I zee a man run down ze—ze plage—'ow you say? —*beach*—And 'e sweem to me. Just as 'e reach me a great wave sweep ovair 'im—— [*REX gazes incredulously, wondering what will happen.*] 'E sink—I sink—down—down—down through ze green watair!

MRS. VAN ZILE. And did your sins all rush through your mind like they describe in books?

POLLY. My sins? Mon Dieu—'ow many *hours* do you zink I am down zaire?

MYRTLE. [*To MRS. DAVIS.*] Did you ever hear anything so shameless?

POLLY. Zen all go black. Zen somezing grabs me by ze leg.

MYRTLE. By the leg? [*Women shocked.*]

MRS. DAVIS. Oh, Rex, how could you?

HARRY. I'm surprised at you, Rex.

POLLY. Oh, 'e did not see what 'e was doing; 'e was nearly drowning heemself.

REX. [*Trying to help it out.*] Yes. A drowning man will clutch at a straw. [*Imitating business.*]

POLLY. [*Quickly drawing herself up indignant-ly.*] I beg your pardon.

REX. [*Overcome.*] Oh—ah—what I mean——

MYRTLE. Why, Rex!

POLLY. 'E zink eet was my arm 'e 'ave 'old of. Zen 'e see 'is meestake and because 'e ees a gentleman 'e let go. I sink again. 'E dive for me like a fish and grab my hair wiz one hand and my neck by ze othair. 'E kick—— [*Illustrating with arms*] 'e tell me to kick. I kick. We come to ze top. 'E sweem wiz one arm; I sweem wiz ze othair. 'E drag me to shallow watair. 'E carry me to shore. 'E save my life. My 'ero. Et voilà!

[*She kisses him on cheek, which leaves a red mark from her make-up. She sits on chair, crosses her leg on knee, and uses a lipstick as the others eye her with varied emotions.*]

HARRY. [*To MYRTLE.*] You little thought, Miss Davis, the day that Rex annoyed you by making fun of the Life Savers, he would so soon become one.

MYRTLE. [*Rising.*] I've certainly learned a great deal about Rex this afternoon that amazes me.

REX. [*U p s e t.*] Why, Myr—please don't think—— [*She turns away from him.*]

HARRY. [*MRS. VAN ZILE rises and rings bell. HARRY grabs his arm and speaks to REX between his teeth.*] Stay here, you bone-head.

POLLY. [*Rising to MYRTLE.*] Oh, you are not going yet, Mees—Mees Davis? We 'ave as yet no

chance to become—— [*Turns to REX.*] What ees zat word I like?—ah—choms!

[*PARKER crosses from hall to veranda and then enters and takes off tea wagon.*]

MYRTLE. [*Ecily.*] I think you will find the chums you have already made more congenial. Come, mother.

[*POLLY sits again, giving HARRY a look.*]

REX. [*Crossing up to door, following MYRTLE.*] I—I can't be of any help about the concert, can I, Myrtle?

MYRTLE. None whatever, thank you. Come, mother.

MRS. DAVIS. [*Reluctantly.*] I don't see why you drag me away. [*Exits after MYRTLE.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Following her guests to the hall and speaking as she goes.*] You'll excuse me, won't you? I must go with my friend Mrs. Davis—I—— [*She goes out, overcome by it all.*]

POLLY. [*Coming to HARRY and thinking she is alone with the boys, drops her French accent.*] How did I do it? [*REX indicates COMMODORE, who is half reclining on sofa. He smiles broadly as she looks at him.*] Look at little Kewpie.

HARRY. [*Indicating COMMODORE to her.*] Kootchy—kootch! Sh! Get rid of that fellow.

POLLY. [*Crossing to COMMODORE.*] I like to 'ear what zey zay about me. I'm afraid my poor ear she start to burn again. [*Speaks in conspiratorial whisper to COMMODORE; COMMODORE crosses to*

POLLY.] Be a good boy—go out and defend my poor charactair. I should 'ate Mrs. Van Zile to zink bad zings about me.

COMMODORE. [*Taking her hand and kissing it.*] Lady, you have but to command me.

[HARRY rises.]

REX. [*Protesting involuntarily.*] Here!

COMMODORE. [*Flirting.*] What about a little supper at the inn—just you and me.

POLLY. [*Embarrassed.*] Sank you—but—I am afraid I cannot. I am down 'ere for a rest—and I maike no engagement.

COMMODORE. Ah, come along. I never take "no" from a pretty girl. I want to introduce you to my own special cocktail: the Lulu Ballulo. It's a bird.

POLLY. A bird?

HARRY. Yes, I hear it calling you. Run along, Commodore.

COMMODORE. What's the matter? Are you young fellows afraid I'll cut you out? I'll phone you to-night; perhaps you'll change your mind. [*At door.*] What time do you go in bathing?

POLLY. Seex—in ze morning.

COMMODORE. Gosh! Pretty early. [*Gaily.*] But I've got an alarm clock.

[*Exits. They close door after him in back.*]

POLLY. [*Without accent.*] Oh, that was terrible.

HARRY. I guess he wants to go into the life-saving corps, too.

REX. [*To HARRY.*] Why on earth didn't you tell us that you were publishing that rescue story?

POLLY. [*Rises.*] Yes, I almost sank beneath that green wave.

HARRY. You certainly are a wonder. I have to keep on saying "minister's daughter, minister's daughter"—or I'll be offering you fancy cocktails myself.

POLLY. [*Referring to COMMODORE.*] Wasn't he persistent?

REX. I'd like to kick him.

POLLY. He embarrassed me terribly. I was afraid every minute I was going to blush. Wouldn't it be awful?

REX. Why?

POLLY. Why? A woman with my past blushing! Can you imagine it?

HARRY. No, that's right. If you're going to be a bad woman you ought to be a good one.

POLLY. I hope the Commodore won't keep on bothering me. I'm afraid I'm going to have a lot of trouble with him. [*Crossing over to sofa.*]

HARRY. He'll stop bothering you as soon as your engagement is announced.

[*CLAY enters in back, closing door.*]

REX. You're going to announce it?

HARRY. No; *you* are.

REX. But not *yet*.

POLLY WITH A PAST

HARRY. Right away—this afternoon. Clay, going to announce the engagement.

REX. But wait——

HARRY. Wait nothing. Didn't we agree to say you and Polly were engaged?

CLAY. That will start Myrtle on the war path.

HARRY. Yes; it hasn't gone far enough.

POLLY. Not far enough?

REX. Now, listen. I've been thinking a lot about this engagement part of our scheme and there are difficulties.

POLLY. [*Rising.*] Difficulties?

REX. Yes! What sort of a cad am I going to look when I throw her over?

HARRY. You *needn't* throw her over.

REX. [*Bewildered.*] Why, you just said——

POLLY. [*Crossing to REX.*] Don't be frightened. I shall discover that you were merely dazzled by me; that you really love Myrtle. And I shall do what that French actress in Camille did. I shall join your two hands and say—— [*In French accent*] "Maike 'im 'appy, as only a good woman *can* maike a good man 'appy. And when people say bad zings about me, try not to judge me too 'arshly!"

[*She does this with great feeling, and all except REX burst out laughing.*]

REX. [*To POLLY.*] Well, if you think it's the right thing to do——

CLAY. Of course, it is.

POLLY WITH A PAST

HARRY. So now that's settled. We'll clear out and give Rex a chance to tell his mother.

REX. [*His jaw dropping.*] I've—got—to—tell—mother?

HARRY. Of course, you have.

REX. Yes, I know. How—how would you do it? I don't want to be too sudden about it.

HARRY. Go tell her you love the girl and that you want to marry her. Clay, come over here and sit down.—Just pretend *you're* his mother.

CLAY. And you're Rex.

HARRY. [*Getting chair and fixing it for CLAY.*] Sit in this chair, Mama. [*CLAY sits. He pulls out a large silk handkerchief and puts it over his knees. HARRY lays his hand on CLAY's shoulder.*] Mother, dear, I have something to tell you. I'm afraid it may be a shock to you, but you know I wouldn't willingly do anything to hurt you, don't you?

CLAY. [*To HARRY, pretending he is REX's mother.*] You don't need to go any further, Rex. [*His voice breaks.*] I can guess what you are going to tell me. [*Wipes a tear from his eye.*]

HARRY. [*To CLAY.*] She's a good woman at heart, mother, and I love her. [*Kisses his hand, which he places on CLAY's forehead. Then he turns to REX.*] Perfectly easy, isn't it?

REX. [*Not so sure.*] Yes—er——

CLAY. I'll go tell your mother you want to speak to her here. [*Exits.*]

HARRY. We'll go out into the garden and inspect

the havoc Stiles has been making in the last three days. [*They start to go.*]

POLLY. [*Looking up inquiringly.*] Stiles?

HARRY. The new gardener.

REX. Then—shall I call you in presently?

HARRY. No; you'll come back in a few minutes.

POLLY. I'll just hold out my arms and say "Mother!" [*Looking out.*] Oh, how lovely it is out here with the blue sky, and the beach, and the rolling dunes. And to think, that two weeks ago, I was in a hot kitchen cooking your dinner.

[*HARRY and POLLY exit into garden.*]

REX *looks anxiously at watch, then replacing it he crosses to chair on which CLAY was sitting and leaning over places hand on back exactly in the manner shown by HARRY. His lips move and he gesticulates as he rehearses the announcement and follows business. As he stoops over to kiss, MRS. VAN ZILE comes in, looks around in rather a frightened fashion, sees the siren has disappeared and breathes a sigh of relief.*

MRS. VAN ZILE. Mr. Collum said you wanted to speak to me, Rex.

REX. [*Turning abruptly, overcome.*] Yes.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Looking around and lowering her voice.*] She—she's gone?

REX. Paulette? She's in the garden. [*With a slight crack in his voice.*] You'd better sit down, mother. [*He indicates the rehearsal chair, but his*

mother chooses another one.] Take this chair, won't you?

MRS. VAN ZILE. This one is very comfortable, thank you, Rex.

[Sitting in chair by sofa. He hesitates a moment, then crosses so as to approach the chair she is sitting in from the same side as HARRY indicated in the rehearsal. He can't do this so he comes back to the other side; the change in attitude bothers him.]

REX. Mother, dear, I have something to tell you. *[As though recalling HARRY's words.]* I'm afraid it might be a shock to you, but you know I wouldn't willingly do anything to hurt you, don't you?

MRS. VAN ZILE. What on earth are you talking about?

REX. *[This is awful. Having nerved himself up to the speech, he now crumbles up completely.]* No—that's not right—— *[Stretches his neck and runs a finger inside his collar band.]*

MRS. VAN ZILE. Rex, have you been out in the hot sun lately without your hat?

REX. No—why?

MRS. VAN ZILE. *[Rising and crossing.]* You're behaving very strangely, dear. I know, of course, what a sweet, innocent unsuspecting nature you have and how easily a clever woman could get around you.

REX. If you mean Miss Bady—she—she's not as—as wicked as they say, mother.

MRS. VAN ZILE. I don't think any *one* woman could be.

REX. No — yes. I mean — you're mistaken, mother. And she's all alone.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Judging from what I hear, it's the first time she ever has been.

REX. [*Dabbing his brow with handkerchief.*] And I need a friend—that is to say, *she* needs a friend——

MRS. VAN ZILE. Rex, you've saved her life; you've done *quite* enough for her. [*Sits in rehearsal chair.*]

REX. [*Seeing her sit in this chair, new courage comes to him; he smiles, and he goes over eagerly and begins again.*] Mother, dear, I told you I have something to tell you. I'm afraid it might be a shock——

MRS. VAN ZILE. I must say, Rex, your behavior in bringing that woman into my house was thoughtless——

REX. As I was saying——

MRS. VAN ZILE. You probably don't know it, but she is a very dreadful person.

REX. It may be a shock——

[*MYRTLE enters and comes down.*]

MYRTLE. Rex, I've been thinking it over——

REX. Yes?

MYRTLE. I've decided to let you help me with the platform arrangements.

[*POLLY enters followed by HARRY.*]

POLLY. [*Advancing with outstretched arms, as prearranged, with French accent throughout.*] *Mama!*

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Looking over her shoulder to see if POLLY's mother is perchance standing beside her, turns back; REX follows her gaze and is rooted in horror to the spot. MRS. VAN ZILE rises.*] What! What did you say?

POLLY. Eet ees so—so long since I 'ave said zat beautiful word, mama!

MRS. VAN ZILE. I—I don't understand. [*Turning to HARRY.*]

HARRY. [*Whispering to POLLY.*] The idiot hasn't told her.

POLLY. Surely 'e—Rex. You haven't told your mama?

REX. No; not exactly—but——

MRS. VAN ZILE. Told me what?

POLLY. [*Crossing to MRS. VAN ZILE.*] Zat we are engage.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Engaged?

POLLY. Oui.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Engaged to be married?

POLLY. Oui. [*Taking REX by his arm.*]

REX. [*As HARRY nudges him.*] Oui.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Sinking into armchair.*] Rex!

REX. It's true, mother.

MYRTLE. Oh, you're joking, Rex.

POLLY. Getting married, eet ees no joke.

[*COMMODORE appears in doorway.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. Robert—Robert—they're engaged.

COMMODORE. [MRS. VAN ZILE *makes an effectual gesture towards REX and POLLY.*] Engaged? [With a note of deep regret.] Oh!

POLLY. What ees ze matter? [Turns swiftly, clutching REX's arm.] I see! Eet ees a meestake zey zink you are making.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [With a feeble effort at emphasis.] A mistake!

POLLY. At last I 'ave found a good man; a man who will protect me; who ees strong and noble.

HARRY. [Boosts up REX, who is standing weak-kneed.] Look strong and noble.

REX. Yes.

[CLAY enters from library. COMMODORE, in pantomime, says to CLAY as he comes in, "CLAY — CLAY — they're engaged!" Then CLAY goes over below sofa.]

POLLY. [To boys.] 'As no one anyzing to say to me? [To women.] Ah, you zink I want 'im because 'e ees rich? [Direct to boys.] You zink a pure love eet ees impossible to me, because you 'ave 'eard I am a weecked woman. Well, eet ees true I 'ave not always been good. You do not know 'ow difficult life ees when you are poor and alone and all ze time among bad man. [COMMODORE turns quietly and sneaks off as she looks pointedly at him. HARRY continues to boost REX. She turns to boys.] I see now why Rex 'e 'as not told you we are en-

gage. [REX wilts as she turns on him and HARRY.]
'E was ashame—ashame of me.

REX. Yes—no.

POLLY. I weel not marry a man who ees ashame
of me. I weel go—where ees my child? [Crosses to
window-door.]

MRS. VAN ZILE. [Horried.] Your child!

POLLY. *My lectle Salomé—mon petit chien.* 'E
love me; 'e understand; 'e alone does not care what
my past 'as been. [Looks back.] I want wiz all
my 'eart to be a good woman; but ze world eet maike
me an outcast. I weel go. A man may live two lives,
but a woman can live only one. [As she goes out
into garden.] Eet eesn't fair, eet eesn't fair!

HARRY. [To REX.] Play up—play up.

REX. [Same mock tragedy.] I cannot let her go
like that. Paulette, Paulette! It isn't fair!—

[REX has been half sinking; CLAY and
HARRY are beside him; they, aside, half lift
him up and shove him after POLLY. He goes
out with short little steps. The others sit
down, completely overcome.]

MYRTLE. Rex!

MRS. VAN ZILE. [Crossing to HARRY.] Oh, what
shall we do? Do you think he means to forgive her?

HARRY. Yes, I think so.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Then—then he must love her!

MYRTLE. [Crossing down to MRS. VAN ZILE.]
No, he doesn't. He's only fascinated. There's a
glamour about such women.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Yes, I suppose there is. I felt it myself. [*Sitting in armchair.*]

HARRY. Yes; Rex is under the same spell that cost poor Petrowski his life.

MRS. VAN ZILE. What?

MYRTLE. Petrowski?

HARRY. [*Working it up.*] It's rumored that Paulette Bady is the mysterious woman who won the heart of the world famous musician, Vladimir Petrowski.

CLAY. It was after he found out that she had tricked him and flouted him that he went out and took his life.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Oh—terrible!

MYRTLE. Think what a dreadful danger this is to Rex!

MRS. VAN ZILE. What shall I do?

[*MYRTLE sits on chaise-longue, thinking.*]

CLAY. What is there to do?

HARRY. I'm afraid he's lost.

MYRTLE. No—no! [*Rising and coming back of*
MRS. VAN ZILE.] He's not lost! We must not despair! *We must save him!*

[*A beaming smile spreads over HARRY's face, he swells out his chest and turns to CLAY; they shake hands, aside, at the promised success of their scheme.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. Save him! Yes, but how?

MYRTLE. Well, I have a plan. [*They gather around.*] First, you must be very nice to her.

MRS. VAN ZILE. *I must——*

HARRY. [*Agreeing with MYRTLE throughout.*] Yes, we all must.

MYRTLE. We must throw them together all we can so he will *sicken* of her.

HARRY. [*To MRS. VAN ZILE.*] I think it would help things if you asked her to come and stay here.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Overcome.*] Ask her to stay here?

CLAY. Yes. We mustn't seem to oppose them yet.

HARRY. True.

MRS. VAN ZILE. But if we have them living in the same house, won't it seem as if I am countenancing this engagement?

MYRTLE. Even that's better than having them elope, isn't it?

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*With a gasp.*] Elope! I hadn't thought of that.

MYRTLE. I know! I'll telephone to his uncle.

CLAY. [*Halted.*] Rex's uncle?

MYRTLE. If anyone can advise us *he* can. I'll get him on the long distance myself now. [*Starts up.*]

HARRY. [*Realizing this may be a serious complication.*] Hold on, you'd better go slow about this.

MYRTLE. What is his number?

MRS. VAN ZILE. He's always at the Metropolitan Club in the afternoon.

MYRTLE. I'll tell him *you* said he must come down at once.

HARRY. No—no. You shouldn't do that.

MYRTLE. [*Eloquently.*] Why not? Do you want to see your best friend ruin his life?

HARRY. No; but Clay and I can help you handle this.

MYRTLE. I think we'd better have someone who's had more experience with women. [*Exits off back into music room.*]

HARRY. More experience?

MRS. VAN ZILE. Yes. Prentice will know how to talk to this sort of woman; he was very wild in his younger days.

CLAY. [*Sees POLLY coming in.*] Ssh—ssh!

[*POLLY enters followed by REX.*]

POLLY. [*Crossing down to HARRY, then to MRS. VAN ZILE.*] I am all right again. [*Giving dog to CLAY, who gives it to PARKER, who has entered in back and then goes off.*] You weel forgive me, Mrs. Van Zeele? I 'ave ze temperament; eet carry me away.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Yes—yes, of course.

POLLY. Rex, 'e 'as calm me. 'E say 'e forgive all zat I do in ze long ago days.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Does he? That's nice. He's so forgiving. Won't you sit down?

POLLY. Merci.

[*She and REX sit on the same chair close to MRS. VAN ZILE, who sits and looks behind*

her for support to MYRTLE, but sees she is not there. HARRY, however, comes to the rescue.]

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*To POLLY.*] I do hope you won't do anything rash. You won't elope—or—or——

POLLY. No, nozing like that. I promise. [*Laughing at REX.*]

HARRY. [*Aside to MRS. VAN ZILE.*] Invite her—invite her.

MRS. VAN ZILE. I was thinking it might be well if—if you were to move over here.

POLLY. [*Surprised.*] You mean, come and leeve wiz you?

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Nervously, confused.*] Oui.—I mean a hotel is so public.

REX. What?

POLLY. What do you zink, Rex?

REX. I don't know what to think. [*Looks at*

HARRY. HARRY *nods over* MRS. VAN ZILE's head *for her to consent.*]

POLLY. [*Rising, to MRS. VAN ZILE, with a burst of affection.*] You want zat we should be choms, too?

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Rising.*] Yes—!

POLLY. C'est bien! You should know somezing more about me.

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Aghast, turning to HARRY.*] More! Is there anything more?

POLLY. Oui.—Oh, zanks, you are very kind. [*With a smile.*] I weel come.

[STILES enters from garden.]

STILES. Beg pardon—the flowers for the concert, ma'am——

MRS. VAN ZILE. [*Glad of interruption.*] Oh, yes.

STILES. They've sent the wagon for them. [*He sees POLLY and stares at her.*]

MRS. VAN ZILE. You'll excuse me. Let them select whatever they want. Attend to it at once, Stiles. [*Goes out in back, glad of escape.*]

POLLY. [*Having recognized STILES; aside to HARRY.*] He knows me.

STILES. Polly Shannon! [*They all turn and look at him.*] Polly Shannon here!

POLLY. [*Crossing towards STILES, with accent.*] You make some meestake. I am M'lle Paulette Bady.

STILES. That French actress they're all telling those awful tales about? Why, you're the living image of—— [*Crossing to her.*] No, you *are* Polly Shannon. Dominie Shannon's girl from East Gilead, Ohio.

HARRY. [*Crossing down between STILES and POLLY.*] No, no; this is M'lle Bady, Stiles. *I* know her.

REX. Certainly. *We* know her, too.

CLAY. We've know her for years.

POLLY. Oui.

STILES. So do I know her. Why, many's the meal she's given me after her Paw saved me from sin.

CLAY. Are you crazy, Stiles?

HARRY. [*Aside to CLAY.*] Myrtle's telephoning. Lock the door; she mustn't hear this.

[CLAY goes back and locks MYRTLE in.]

REX. [*Horried.*] Myrtle!

STILES. [*Crossing to POLLY again.*] If you was to hear the stories they're telling about you. They're saying things I know you never done. [*Aroused.*] I'm not going to let them go on. [*Starts off.*] I'm going to tell them you're a good woman.

POLLY. [*Stopping him. Now without accent.*] Not that! Stiles—anything but that!

STILES. But ain't you good? [*Crosses to her.*]

POLLY. [*Mysteriously.*] Yes; but no one must suspect it.

STILES. Not suspect it? Did you say no one must suspect you are good?

POLLY. Yes, you see—[*Very mysteriously.*] There's a rea—[*Breaks off, looks hopelessly at*

HARRY. MYRTLE has now begun to rattle on the inside of the door.]

STILES. Why? But why?

POLLY. You—You wouldn't understand. [*Looks again at HARRY for help, MYRTLE raps on door.*]

STILES. [*Hearing the knocking.*] What's that knocking?

HARRY. [*Making out to hear nothing.*] Knocking? What knocking? [*MYRTLE knocks again.*]

STILES. Why, that—don't you hear it? [*Begins to doubt his sensations more and more.*]

HARRY. No.

POLLY. Stiles, you must promise not to tell anyone. Pretend you don't know *who* I am.

HARRY. [*Impressively.*] Polly Shannon—the Polly Shannon *you* know—is dead.

STILES. Dead?

REX. That's it.

CLAY. If anyone asks you, say that you know she's dead.

HARRY. You used to lay daisies on her tombstone.

STILES. Daisies?

ALL. Yes.

STILES. Well, if you say so, sir. But I hate to let 'em go on thinkin' you're bad.

POLLY. But you will? Oh, thank you. I'll do as much for you, Stiles, any time I can.

STILES. Much obliged. [*Knocking.*] There's that knocking again. Don't you hear it now?

HARRY. Stiles, you've been drinking.

STILES. I haven't; not a drop. [*Dubiously, on again hearing knocking.*] Don't you hear it?

CLAY. It's in your mind, Stiles.

HARRY. Yes, drink does that to you.

CLAY. Don't you see spots dancing in front of your eyes?

HARRY. Run along now, Stiles; get out in the fresh air.

STILES. I wonder if I have been drinkin'. [*Exits with just the suggestion of a slight stagger.*]

REX. That was a close shave.

POLLY. Oh, do you think he'll tell? [*Looking after him.*]

[*REX goes up and unlocks door. MYRTLE appears, furious beyond words, revealing her unsuspected temper.*]

MYRTLE. What do you mean by locking me in that room, Rex?

REX. Myrtle!

HARRY. Why, were you inside?

MYRTLE. You heard me. I knocked till my knuckles were sore. Who played this stupid trick? [*To CLAY.*] You? [*Then to HARRY.*] You, Harry?

HARRY. No—no.

MYRTLE. [*To REX.*] Or was it *you*? Can't you find better use for your brains? Or did you lock me in because you didn't want your respectable friends to see the way you were carrying on? You're a poor deluded fool! [*Exits in back.*]

[*REX stands gazing after her, CLAY stands in music room door.*]

HARRY. [*Happily.*] The great scheme is working.

POLLY. She's started in to save you.

HARRY. You're going to get her, boy.

CLAY. You're going to get her. [*Exits into music room.*]

REX. Didn't she lose her temper when she came out of that room!

POLLY. [*Sympathetically.*] You mustn't feel

badly about that, Mr. Van Zile. She'll get over that if only you go and ask her forgiveness.

REX. You really think so?

POLLY. Yes; we women are all alike; we love to forgive.

REX. [*Hesitating.*] Perhaps you are right.

HARRY. [*Has gone up to hallway looking after MYRTLE, comes down.*] She's thinking it over. [*Slapping him on the back.*] She's waiting for you, Rex.

REX. [*Still hesitating.*] I oughtn't to say too much to her—not at first, had I?

HARRY. No—only enough to let her feel she's having an influence.

REX. Ye-yes—didn't she lose her temper! [*Exits rather reluctantly after MYRTLE.*]

POLLY. [*As HARRY comes down.*] Mr. Richardson.

HARRY. [*Coming down to POLLY, who is standing thoughtfully.*] Well, what's the matter, Polly?

POLLY. Mr. Richardson, I'm afraid I can't go through with this.

HARRY. Why, you were wonderful.

POLLY. But there's something inside tells me I'd better leave here right now—before it's too late.

HARRY. Leave Northampton?

POLLY. Yes. I seem all of a sudden to have lost my courage.

HARRY. But you mustn't lose your courage or

Rex will lose Myrtle. Another day or two will see them tied together for life.

POLLY. [*Slowly.*] I suppose Mr. Van Zile would feel very badly if I deserted him now. I wouldn't want that.

HARRY. Of course, you wouldn't. But we've got to work quick with Stiles on the job and uncle on the way. So come, I'll take you over to your hotel and have your trunks sent over.

POLLY. [*Crosses back of table.*] I'm afraid if I'm not careful I'll be getting used to all these pretty clothes and things. I'll miss them terribly when I can't have them any more.

HARRY. Nonsense! Think of Paris.

POLLY. Oh, yes, Paris! Funny how seeing Stiles again brought back East Gilead—father and mother—and all those girlish dreams. [*As she sees REX returning.*] But it wasn't that that made me feel I ought to leave here.

[*REX has entered and comes down subdued and silent.*]

HARRY. [*Chuckling.*] Did you see her, Rex?

REX. Yes.

HARRY. And she forgave you?

REX. She said she'd think it over.

HARRY. She *will*! Come along, Polly. [*He goes out laughing.*]

POLLY. Yes, you should be very happy, Mr. Van Zile. [*Pinning flowers in his coat.*] You should smile about it. Well, if you won't smile for Polly—

[*With accent.*] Zen smile for Paulette. Just one leetle smile to show Paulette zat Rex ees 'appy. [REX *smiles.*] Zere!—zat ees better! Au revoir, mon cher fiancé.

REX. [*Halting her.*] Polly.

POLLY. [*Like the maid, without accent.*] Yes, sir.

REX. I think you're a brick to do all this for me. You're so sympathetic.

POLLY. Oh, yes, sir. I understand how you feel.

REX. Strange the way we first met.

POLLY. Oh, yes, sir—I was singing. [*She starts to sing a few bars of same song as when he first met her.*] I'm doing my best to help you win Miss Myrtle.

REX. Thank you.

POLLY. Good luck!

[*She goes out. REX stands looking after her, hands in pockets. He smiles broadly and shows he's fallen in love with her.*]

[CURTAIN]

ACT THREE

SCENE: *Same as Act Two. Late afternoon some days later.*

Curtain rises on empty stage. PARKER comes out of library and crosses off through hall.

Enter REX from porch, with golf bag over shoulder.

REX. [*Calls back.*] Polly! Polly! Nobody's here!

[*POLLY, in a charming sport suit, enters with golf club; REX places golf bag by stairs.*]

POLLY. [*Not using accent.*] Ah! it's nice to get some place where I can talk without having to shrug and wave my arms—[*Goes into accent.*] And play I am ze French actress.

REX. Isn't it wonderful the way everybody is falling over themselves to be nice to you?

POLLY. [*By staircase.*] We didn't allow for the alluring quality of wickedness. Half the married men in Northampton have told me their wives don't understand them. I'm afraid you'll have a lot of trouble living down to your reputation after I've left the house.

REX. [*Leaning against railing, looking at her.*]
I suppose you're awfully keen to go to Paris and
commence studying?

POLLY. I'll be doing the thing I've always
wanted to.

REX. You'll have your dream—success.

POLLY. And you'll have yours—Myrtle.

REX. [*Taking a brace.*] I've been thinking a
lot about Myrtle in the last few days.

POLLY. [*Shyly.*] Why limit it?

REX. [*Close to POLLY, his elbow on railing.*]
Do you know, Polly, I don't honestly believe she'd
want me, *if* she knew the game we were playing.

POLLY. [*Hands REX her golf club.*] But she
never will know.

REX. It doesn't seem fair to her. I mean I
oughtn't to *trick* a girl into caring for me.

POLLY. But Mr. Richardson told me that Miss
Davis is just waiting to throw you the life-line.

REX. That's it. Look how disappointed she'd
be when she found I wasn't a moral wreck! Why,
it—it'd be like marrying under false pretenses.

POLLY. I see. You want to go to her, make a
frank confession, and take your chances.

REX. [*Involuntarily.*] No! No! I don't want
to take any chances. What I mean is—telling her
wouldn't be fair to you.

POLLY. Isn't it a little late to be so sensitive?

REX. [*With a sickly laugh.*] Well, better late
than never.

POLLY. But if you won't tell her the truth about our scheme, and you won't marry her without telling her, what *are* you going to do?

REX. [*Cheerfully.*] It—it looks as if I'd have to give her up, doesn't it?

POLLY. [*Not knowing what to make of it.*] Give her up?

REX. [*Patting her hand.*] Don't worry about me. "Men have died," etc. You know that Shakespeare stuff.

POLLY. You're only nervous as the hour approaches.

REX. I'm nervous, all right.

[*POLLY ascends slowly, turns to find REX looking at her.*]

Enter MRS. VAN ZILE.]

Hello, mother.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Oh, Rex, I've been waiting for you to come in.

POLLY. [*With accent again.*] You want zat I should go?

MRS. VAN ZILE. Oh, no, no. I have something I want to show Rex. Will you come?

REX. Certainly. [*Smiling.*] Didn't Paulette look wonderful at the concert last night?

MRS. VAN ZILE. Yes, yes; quite wonderful.

POLLY. I ought to; eet took some time to do eet. Oh, Madame, I weesh zat you would really like me.

MRS. VAN ZILE. Why, I do. Of course, I mean—Come, Rex—[*Starts to exit.*]
